

**TESTIMONY BY BEN GILMAN
ATTORNEY, CHAIR MAINE CHILDREN'S TRUST AND MEMBER, READYNATION**

**BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEES
ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES**

**IN SUPPORT OF LD 1726
"AN ACT TO BUILD MAINE'S ECONOMY BY SUPPORTING CHILD CARE FOR
WORKING FAMILIES"
MAY 10, 2023, 10 A.M.**

Chairs Baldacci and Myer, and distinguished members of the Health and Human Services Committee, I am Ben Gilman and I am testifying today wearing many hats: as an attorney, former General Counsel to the [Maine State Chamber of Commerce](#), Chair of the [Maine Children's Trust](#), and father of four children ages 8-18 years old. I am also a member of [ReadyNation](#), a national nonprofit made up of business leaders who want to improve the current and future workforce through investments in early childhood programs. We believe that public investments in high-quality early learning programs—specifically child care—are foundational to growing Maine's workforce and economy.

Research shows that high-quality early learning programs help prepare our future workforce. These programs achieve this goal by developing the foundation of academic and other skills in our youngest learners.

This Committee is dealing with a myriad of child care legislation this session because, frankly, Maine's child care industry is on the verge of imploding. That puts our businesses and workforce at great risk. We learned during the pandemic that businesses need reliable child care. Without it, employees who are parents can't work. That makes helping fix employees' barriers to high-quality child care a priority for business leaders.

What qualifies as quality child care? First, a program's physical environment must be safe, clean, and attractive to children. Classroom materials should stimulate physical and cognitive development, and instruction and curriculum should be developmentally appropriate.

Most importantly, the child care teachers' interactions need to be consistent and supportive and stimulate learning. Early childhood educators must also be well-trained before they start teaching, and they need to receive continuous professional development once they're on the job. Adequate compensation is also key to attracting and retaining top talent.



To provide the level of care and attention needed to facilitate children’s development, child-to-teacher ratios must be low. Because the child care “day” can be as long as 12 hours, programs should also cover the entire day with adequate staff.

The main driver of child-care costs is labor, and Maine child care workers earn low salaries. Fortunately, last session the legislature and governor approved the first major General Fund support for Maine’s 6,500 child care workers in the form of a \$200 monthly wage supplement.

As a result, the average wage of child care workers in Maine increased by \$1.15/hour—from \$14.90 to \$16.05, which is about \$33,000 annually. It’s a good start, but by no means is the job finished.

According to a [September 2021 report by the U.S. Treasury](#), child care workers, as a sector, are the second-lowest paid in our nation.

Think about how \$16.05 per hour compares to what we see advertised for workers in fast food restaurants, at coffee shops, and in our local retail establishments.

Last year the legislature and governor took a major first step to address these challenges, but there is more to do. Fortunately, we have Senate President Jackson’s bipartisan proposal before you now seeking to further increase the wage supports for Maine’s critical child care workforce and to bring child care teachers’ average median wage closer to the hourly wage of other entry-level jobs.

If every Maine family had access to the quality child care they need, we could increase workforce participation across Maine and unleash the potential for true economic growth. We would also have more people choosing to move to Maine specifically to work and raise their children. That’s why it is critical for businesses and families that the child care crisis is addressed. I urge this Committee to support the wage supplement increases in LD 1726.