



MAINE

**TESTIMONY BY BRIGADIER GENERAL DWAIN DRUMMOND, U.S. Army (retired)
AND MEMBER, MISSION: READINESS**

**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 Brigadier General Dwaine Drummond. U.S. Army (retired). I served more than 36 years in the Army and Maine National Guard, commanding at the company, battalion, and brigade levels. I am also a member of the organization Mission: Readiness, which advocates for state and federal programs that lead to better outcomes for our kids, reduce crime, strengthen national security, and builds a better workforce. Mission: Readiness is an organization of more than 750 retired admirals and generals, 25 of whom are here in Maine, who champion research-supported solutions that help keep kids healthy, well-educated, and out of trouble, so that they can pursue whatever path they want in life, including military service, if they so choose. In addition, I am a father and former middle school coach. I have a personal stake in advocating for programs that help kids be successful in school and give them greater opportunities as adults.

My Mission: Readiness colleagues and I are concerned about the dire need to prepare our children for their future and that preparation starts in their youngest years.

Some might wonder how a crisis-level lack of high-quality, affordable early care and education like that embraced in LD 1726 could impact our national security. The U.S. Department of Defense’s ineligibility rate is strong evidence of the need to do more, earlier. Unfortunately, 77% of America’s 17- to 24-year-olds are not eligible to serve in the military, if that is their career choice. The reasons for ineligibility include lack of physical fitness, lack of educational attainment, substance abuse, and involvement in serious crime — often drug-related.

Very often people think of our military in terms of the fast movers and high-tech systems: the F-35 Lightning 2 fighter jets, ships like the DDG 51 destroyers, the American M1A2 Abrams tanks, and other amazing state-of-the-art technologies. These weapons are essential, but even more essential are the people who stand ready to defend our country and carry out its mission. If 77% of young Americans are ineligible for military service, our nation risks not having qualified people needed to secure our future. This is not just a problem for the military; it impacts all career fields, all citizens.

Fortunately, we can address these disqualifiers with early intervention and support. A child's first five years are fundamental to the success or failure that comes afterwards. Young children develop core pre-literacy and pre-math skills, and build the foundations for all later cognitive and social learning. That's why high-quality child care programs are so important. Research shows that programs like high-quality public pre-K, child care, and Head Start can help create a stronger educational foundation, prevent obesity, and reduce behavioral issues. One study of the Perry Preschool Program found that almost half of the preschool graduates were performing at grade level by the age of 14, compared with just 15 percent of their peers who did not participate in the program. The kids who attended Perry Preschool were also 44% more likely to graduate from high school.

By providing more young children with high-quality child care opportunities for early learning, as designed in LD 1726, we can help them become successful students who are more likely to finish school and pursue any career path of their choice.

There are several important provisions in this bill before you today – key among those is further support to our critical child care workforce by bringing the average median wage closer to that of other entry-level jobs. These are a sound investment in our future and continue the work done by the 130th legislature on this key issue. I encourage the committee to give this proposal your bipartisan support.

Like all of you, members of Mission: Readiness want all young people in Maine and across our great nation to grow up to be citizen-ready in whatever field they seek — to become our future workforce, our military leaders, our taxpayers, and our community, state, and national leaders. Helping give our youngest citizens the foundations needed for later success is a wise investment of our state resources. I hope you will support LD 1726.

Thank you for your attention and for your service to our great state.