

Testimony of Courtney Hannus  
In support of  
***LD 1726: An Act to Build Maine's Economy by Supporting Child Care for Working Families  
sponsored by Senate President Troy Jackson***

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Health and Human Services Committee, my name is Courtney Hannus. I am a Lead Preschool Teacher, and I live in Saco. I'm testifying in support of LD 1726 An Act to Build Maine's Economy by Supporting Child Care and Working Families.

I support raising child care educator wages because it's time that this profession is seen as valuable and important to society. By keeping us at unlivable wages it is continuing to say that we are not important. It continues to say that children of the future are not important .It continues to defer people from entering the field of Early Childhood education leaving a lack of future educators. It contributes to a high turnover work environment where educated full hearted people are forced to find another route of employment and left heartbroken to discover that their passion, their hard work and effort is left behind.

I have been a lead preschool teacher for ten years. I started at 12 dollars an hour and have recently just now after ten years, have made it to 19 dollars an hour. 19 dollars an hour is unheard of in the world or early childhood education. Currently a one-bedroom apartment in the southern Maine area averages out to be 1,450-1,600 dollars. That is over half of my net pay. more than 50 percent of my income is forced to go to shelter alone. Not to mention sky rocketing groceries, car, phone, and school loan bills.

I have personally moved 6 times since summer of 2021. As a young (30yrs) single person I cannot find a stable safe apartment in a price range I can afford. I have moved into a cockroach infested apartment, I have combated police calls, drug warn strangers entering my building and unfit landlords all to find a home I can pay for. I have applied to affordable housing through the Maine government and was told because I make literal cents more over the qualifications, they would happily give it to me for a higher price. I have not gone more than 6 months without wondering where I will live next or obsessively checking rental apps. I have currently taken the chance to live with 2 strangers I met on facebook and had that fall through because the landlord has decided to end the lease and put the rental back on the market because " It is under rented, and he knows a lot of people that will pay more to live here." I am currently on the lookout for yet another place to live.

I am an educated early childhood educator who has qualified experience in the field for ten years. I work full time and have formed beautiful connections with the families of South Portland and am considered a valued member of this community. I care deeply for the children I work with. I am truly in tears as I write this and admit that I am not sure I can pursue my passion of early childhood education because it has proven to be an unfit career path for someone who is simply trying to live.

Raising the wages of early childhood educators will raise and bring awareness to the importance of early childhood education. Without raising wages, we continue to put the educators and the children of Maine on the back burner and further solidify that we are simply not important enough. We are important, we are valued, we are necessary, we are deeply needed, we matter. It's time to raise the wages of early childhood educators.

Please vote in support of LD 1726,  
Courtney Hannus