

Testimony of Melissa Holt  
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 Melissa Holt. I am a childcare facility Director & Owner, and I live in Exeter. 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 will help minimize staff turn over. It is challenging to maintain strong staff when they feel overworked and underpaid. The teachers in this field have varying types of education and experience, but the thing they have in common is the passion they have for working with children. They should not have to sacrifice income for their families to live out their passion of working with children. We should not take them for granted and we should treat them with as much respect as we do for teachers working for the DOE.

I support raising wages for staff so I can open my last classroom. I have a classroom ready to go for 14 children. I have 14 chairs sitting on tables, waiting for students. I have toys, books, lesson plans, sitting and waiting for students. I have a waitlist of 24 families. These families have to wait as the classroom sits there unused, because I do not have the staff to open it. Every time I think we have enough staff, another employee gives their notice. They are not going to another childcare, they are leaving the field entirely because they can not support themselves or their family. Increasing educator wages is just the beginning of the work that needs to be done.

A cost model tool would be very helpful in getting the state to recognize that market rates are too low. Childcare is expensive, too expensive. If we were to charge each family the market rate for the age of their child, we would go out of business. We accept childcare subsidy because we believe that each child has the right to quality early childhood education, however, we need to be mindful of the percentage of students we take who utilize it because we need to ensure we can cover the cost of operation, which can not be done on market rate. Early childhood education/educators is the work behind the workforce, yet, everyone seems to take it for granted. We can certainly try to blaze our own trail but we need support, we need you to hear our voice.

I support raising subsidy eligibility because ALL children deserve the right to quality care. It should not matter if families make 500.00 dollars a month or 2,500.00 a month. Each child from all socio-economic settings deserve quality care to help build their skills and create a strong foundation for the years ahead.

I support shortening the time periods for determining subsidy eligibility because right now it takes far too long. Families apply for subsidy while needing care immediately. We understand their need and enroll them immediately and they pay out of pocket to start. Two months go by and the subsidy award letter comes in the mail. Initial reaction is relief that the family finally has the support they need. Then it hits you, you now owe a refund of 2,000 dollars to the family because of the "start date" on the letter. That money has gone towards operation costs. Yes, I will be able to bill the state. But, it won't be the full rate, only market rate. On top of that, it will

take close to 30 days for me to receive that money, if nothing goes wrong and everything is processed appropriately.

I support shortened time periods for childcare programs receiving subsidy reimbursement because it will decrease time for error. We have received payments late, wrong amounts, over payments, and no payments. It is nearly impossible to get ahold of anyone who can answer your questions directly and they do not seem to have a sense of urgency to ensure the reimbursement happens in a timely manner. The longer it takes for me to receive the reimbursement the bigger the hardship for my small business.

Please vote in support of LD 1726,  
Melissa Holt