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Gorham  
LD 1726

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Testimony of Deborah Arcaro

In support of LD 1726 An Act to Build Maine's Economy by Supporting Child Care and Working Families

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Health and Human Services Committee, my name is Deborah Arcaro. I was a state licensed family child care provider for 33 years before retiring in July '21. I currently volunteer for the Family Child Care Association of Maine Professional Learning Committee. I'm personally testifying in strong support of LD 1726 An Act to Build Maine's Economy by Supporting Child Care and Working Families.

As a sole family child care provider who provided multi-ages care for infant through age 12 for 33 years, I know first hand the importance of the service child care programs provide for both their individual community's economy, but also for the general state economy. Family child care is an important part of the state's child care system. Many of today's family child care programs are also employing staff. Child care programs are small businesses that provide a service that allows parents of young children to work.

I was able to provide a stable income that helped support my family, but I know there are staff who would qualify for Maine's subsidy, as would the provider themselves. This Bill supports those individuals being eligible to access the subsidy support that those not in the field can.

I feel strongly that this Bill if passed will make positive steps in supporting the child care workforce and availability of quality child care for more Maine families.

Some of my thoughts/reasons:

I appreciate the idea of changing the name of the subsidy program to: The Maine Child Care Scholarship Program. I think that better reflects the purpose of this monetary support program. Maine wants children to have access to quality programs that families can afford. While we understand that providers are not in many cases even charging what it truly cost to provide the care.

Developing a task force that will focus specifically on Maine's child care system, which defines the inclusion of multiple participants that are actively in the field is important. Maine's child care providers are the workforce behind the workforce. They are essential workers. If the child care system was to collapse tomorrow the immediate and long-term negative impact on Maine's economy would be hard to overcome. If you are not directly in the field it can be hard to really understand the expansive job that providing child care is. The task force's duties outlined in the Bill address some very important areas Maine needs to consider for building a stronger child care system that will meet future needs across Maine, especially considering diversity and geographics.

The Quality child care costs estimator tool needs to be developed and implemented as soon as possible. The voluntary collection of fees charged by providers has not reflected the true cost of care. That true cost is important for supporting a sustainable child care system in Maine. It is important for increasing the number of providers who contract with the program to accept eligible parents.

Reimbursing child care providers that accept child care subsidies based on enrollment and not attendance is a stabilizing move. We know that from our experiences during COVID.

Any changes to have a quicker process, retroactive payment and quicker notification of provider on family eligibility is appreciated. I was contracted with the subsidy program for multiple years when I had parents that were eligible. It was not always an easy program to work with. To engage more providers that needs to change.

The collection of relevant data this Bill includes to review the subsidy program changes and impact is important. Barriers cannot be overcome without knowledge of them. Successful parts of a program can not be reinforced and grown without knowledge also.

I have always believed that children have the right to attend quality programs that promote their learning and development. I also believe that affordable access for all families to quality child care is essential. Quality programs promote families' self-sufficiency helping them to better provide for the wellbeing of their children. The Bill's stated phased implementation plan with benchmarks for limiting child care costs, by 2030, to no more than 7% of a family's income for a family earning up to 250% of the median family income in the State is a goal worth striving for.

Thank you for your time and attention.