

Testimony offered on behalf of LD1726

**Colleen J. Quint
President & CEO
Alfond Scholarship Foundation
Portland, ME
May 10, 2023**

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. Thank you for the opportunity to share this testimony with you.

My name is Colleen Quint and I am the President & CEO of the Alfond Scholarship Foundation. Our My Alfond Grant program awards \$500 at birth to every baby born a Maine resident. To date, over \$72m has been awarded to more than 145,000 Maine children for their future education after high school. I also serve as chair of the Strong Foundations strand of MaineSpark, the initiative that seeks to boost Maine's educational attainment rate for credentials of value to 60% by 2025. The Strong Foundations strand focuses on Maine children from birth through 5th grade.

I write today in support of LD1726/SP0690, Senate President Jackson's Bill: An Act to Build Maine's Economy by Supporting Child Care for Working Families.

Making childcare accessible and affordable is of critical importance to children's development, and to parents' ability to participate in the workforce. And ensuring that early childhood educators earn a living wage is essential to creating and sustaining the workforce that supports children and families.

The steps outlined in Senate President Jackson's bill are foundational to building the kind of early childhood education system that Maine so clearly needs. While many of the elements of the bill take positive steps in this direction, I would like to call particular attention to the wage supplements and other workforce strategies. Certainly real progress has been made in this regard over the past several years, and this proposal builds off the good work of the Administration and the Legislature from last session.

Investing in our early care and education workforce ensures that we have available child care for working families. The new salary supplement program uses a tiered system to encourage individuals to earn credentials and degrees, and encourages those who have earned credentials and degrees to stay in the field through increased stipends for those with higher levels of education and/or experience.

Having more qualified, trained and experienced educators in early care and education will improve quality. And quality early childhood education is a critical foundational issue for our children and their future – as well as for our current and future workforce.

Just last week, I stopped at a local Head Start program to drop off some nonperishable items for their food pantry. This particular food pantry is for staff. Clearly more needs to be done.

As a state, we have taken good and strong steps to support people going into – and staying in – early care and education. We need to continue to build on those steps by improving wages and thereby ensuring that children, families and the state's economy has that foundational support.

Thank you for your consideration of LD1726.