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Thank you for taking time to listen and help solve the problem of available, affordable, and dependable child care. My wife and I are both teachers who live and work in Aroostook County. We both make a good wage compared to many in our area. During July of 2021, we found out our in-home daycare provider was closing effective early September, 2021. At the time, we had two children in daycare with a third on the way (due in Spring 2022). We immediately began searching for daycare and did not have good luck. There were very few places available with spots for both of our children, or even individual spots to send our children to different facilities.

When the school year started, a collection of family members were caring for our children: grandparents, aunts/uncles, cousins, and family friends offered to lend support as both my wife and I needed to be at school with our students. At times, I did have to take "sick days" because we had no one to care for our youngest (the oldest was in pre-k and attended school in the morning).

In October of 2021, we were able to get my daughter into a fulltime slot at a regional facility. My son continued to go somewhere different every day after school until January of 2022 when we were able to find him an open spot with a different provider than his sister.

We now have two children at the regional facility. We prefer smaller settings/in-home settings, but knew the likelihood of a larger, regional facility to stay open was much better than a smaller provider.

This time of having no daycare was and has been the most stressful time of our years together. Our children are healthy, happy, and well-behaved in the grand scheme of things. We knew that our children would not be a burden to a provider, but the stress added to our family, adults and children included, was immense and very draining. My daughter had a tough time adjusting at first and really struggled with the emotional side of learning a new, large building, new teachers/adults, and adjusting to the much different routine. In the end, this will only make her stronger when faced with challenges, but it was very difficult in the moment for her.

Flash forward to today, our two youngest are at the same regional facility as we first placed our daughter in fall 2021. They are well cared for and enjoy their "home" for the day.

As I mentioned previously, my wife and I make a fair salary for being teachers compared to many in our area. We live within our means and are relatively frugal, but are very much forced to do so based on the cost of child care for our area. We pay \$333 a week for our two children, which equates to \$1300-\$1600 depending if the month is a 4 week or 5 week month. In comparison, this is equal to more than the cost of our single car payment and our mortgage. In 2022, we paid in excess of \$16,000 for daycare (which only includes daycare for the baby from August-December). And we do not qualify for subsidy or daycare support.

In considering how to assist providers, please keep in mind that our youngest population are vulnerable. They are the foundation that will grow to become our leaders of our communities. If we force families to struggle with affording daycare, and force providers to juggle whether to stay open or not, because financially it is not worth it, we are only setting our future up for failure. Another consideration is the huge financial impact it has on the economy when parents are forced to decide whether to work or not.

Daycare must be dependable, affordable, safe, and care for our children in quality/healthy/safe facilities that do not force families to decide who works and who stays home, or wonder how all the bills will be paid. In the end, the family and children are the ones suffering...

Thank you for investigating this issue and I hope in the end a path forward to beneficial support is found for all.