

Testimony of Meredith Gutheinz
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 Meredith Gutheinz. I am a Child Care Director, and I live in Camden. I'm testifying in support of LD 1726 An Act to Build Maine's Economy by Supporting Child Care and Working Families.

I have barely had time to write this important testimony as I have very limited staff and I am in the classroom everyday covering so that we do not have to close. Being a child care teacher is hard. It is year round work with young children who are just learning boundaries and what it means to be part of a community. It is such important hard work. We cannot pay our teachers enough and the doubling of the stipend would help retain staff, recruit staff and not pass on the cost of care to families. Many teachers love their jobs but can make more serving coffee. Young people are not looking to be child care teachers, they want to be public school teachers for the benefits and summers off. This stipend would mean everything to my staff and help me hire more staff so that I can get back to my job as the Director to help support my teachers and families.

If we had an actual cost model tool we could use this for advocacy and fundraising to let the public know what it actually costs for a week of infant care. People say care is so expensive which it is but we at the YMCA are not charging families the actual cost of care. We are challenged to pay teachers more and not raise rates. Having this tool would be so helpful to meet the gap.

So many families make just enough to not qualify for care. I gave an assistant teacher a raise and now she has a parent fee for her subsidy. It is outrageous, she is trying to raise two children, get her degree and work. Raising the subsidy eligibility limit would help every family with raising costs and inflation.

I support ensuring that subsidy reimbursement covers days when children are absent from their program because there is no way child cares could survive if we were not paid for the days children were absent. We cannot staff for 10 children and only have 5 show up if we are only paid for children but have to pay the two teachers. Subsidy reimbursement based on enrollment is crucial for programs. There is already a gap as the market rate is lower than the subsidy rate and if we are only paid for days when the children attend we would not be able to accept children on subsidy. It is pretty simple.

Without investment in child care programs Maine will lose even more of its workforce. Child care is the workforce behind the workforce and for Maine to thrive we need to support child care programs.

I support providing funding to pay for child care for child care employees because it is one perk we can give child care employees. It would be great if we could offer this and still get paid for the slots filled by employee children.

Please vote in support of LD 1726,
Meredith Gutheinz