

Emily Short
Lancaster, NH
LD 1726

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and distinguished members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, my name is Emily Short. I am the Director of Sunnybrook Montessori School, and I live in Lancaster, NH. I'm testifying in support of LD 1726 An Act to Build Maine's Economy by Supporting Child Care for Working Families.

There are many reasons I stand before you today, but I will start by telling you a bit about myself. In July 2020, at the height of the covid-19 pandemic, my family moved to Chebeague Island, Maine from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. I became the Director and Lead Teacher of Kids Place, a small center for year round families. My experience, love of children, and not so typical lifestyle made it too appealing to pass up. I assured my family they would love Maine, the opportunities, the schools, the "Maniacs", and the experiences. I can say with certainty they absolutely did. Personally, I did too. Unfortunately, after a few short years we had to make the decision to leave the home and center we fell in love with, or chance being homeless. This sounds extreme, however, our system is broken. As the highest paid employee, with thousands of hours of training, education, and experience, I made \$17 an hour. Quoting directly from Maine Kids Count Data Book "In Maine in 2020, the estimated living wage was \$26.48 per hour for one parent to support one child. By counties in Maine, this varied from \$24.86 per hour in Franklin County to \$34.79 in Cumberland County." I lived in Cumberland county. Our little island center tried to help, they offered me a \$2.00 raise to \$19.00, then I lost my insurance. My family lost their insurance. As an educator, with an auto-immune disease, two children, and a spouse with diabetes, we could not afford our home, insurance, and child care. With the limited number of children we could accept, and in fairness to taking a spot in the center, I paid to care for my own child. A direct result of lacking funds to support additional staff and qualified educators in the workforce. Moving on, the shocking revelation that we had to move completely rocked our household, and our small island community. Even with giving a two month notice, it took the center an additional five months to find someone qualified and trained in Early Education. Again, pulling statistics from Maine Kids Count Data Book "Research shows the long-term benefits of quality early learning experiences. Programs that begin at birth lead to better outcomes for children and yield up to a 13 percent annual return on public investment." We are at a pivotal point today. Everyone has a choice. If it's the economy you care about, invest in child care. If it's the children you care about, invest in child care.

Please vote in support of LD1726 and liberate educators, parents, and the working class .

Thank you.