

Testimony of Beth Gagnon
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 Beth Gagnon. I am an Assistant Director & Head Preschool Teacher at a Child Care Center, and I live in Old Orchard Beach. I'm testifying in support of LD 1726 An Act to Build Maine's Economy by Supporting Child Care and Working Families.

ECE Teachers work very hard, but are not compensated fairly for their work. Our work is viewed as less-than-important, babysitting rather than professional because of this. We have lost many skilled, valuable teachers who have had to take other jobs in order to pay their bills. The turn over affects families, children, and other staff, which is why I support raising child care educator wages.

I support Maine developing a cost model tool that better supports our understanding of what it costs to provide quality care and education because to many people outside of the profession have no real understanding of what it takes to run a quality program.

I support raising subsidy eligibility for Maine's lower income families because families deserve options to find the right fit for their family, not just take anything they can get (if they can get anything at all).

I support ensuring that subsidy reimbursement covers days when children are absent from their program because teachers need to get paid, even if a child is absent. Likewise, the lights need to stay on, buildings need to be warmed/cooled, etc.

Child care needs to continue to get better. Wages need to be able to go up, and benefits added, which is why I support Maine developing a long term plan to increase investments in child care programs while also increasing subsidy eligibility.

ECE workers need care in order to come to work. They need to be able to afford that care. Centers and families can not shoulder this burden alone. I support providing funding to pay for child care for child care employees.

I support increasing Head Start eligibility and funding because all kids deserve a quality early start to their education.

I support shortened time periods for determining subsidy eligibility because the time it takes to get approval for subsidies is time that the school is not being paid for those spots. That creates a financial hardship. In this day and age, there's no reason we can't be more fiscally responsible with time.

I also support shortened time periods for child care programs receiving subsidy reimbursement because our teachers can't hold off being paid. Neither can the bills. We can't risk having insurance cancelled. All because we are waiting on money we have earned and qualified for. We expect families to pay on time. The state absolutely should as well.

Please vote in support of LD 1726!