

Testimony of Hillary Bellefleur

In support of
LD 1726

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Health and Human Services Committee, my name is Hillary Bellefleur, and a resident of Orrington. I am a 3rd-grade teacher of 10 years, a Milken Educator, and the 2021 Waldo County Teacher of the Year. In this testimony, I speak as a private citizen, not a representative of any school, district, or organization. I'm testifying to support LD 1726, An Act to Build Maine's Economy by Supporting Child Care and Working Families.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of LD #1726, An Act to Build Maine's Economy by Supporting Child Care and Working Families

This bill is important to me as an educator of young children and a born and raised Mainer. By supporting child care and working families, this bill will not only affect how families today can support themselves and live happier and healthier lives but can affect the next generation of Mainers.

Through my experience as an educator of younger children, I know we must build strong foundations before coming into Kindergarten classrooms. By supporting and allowing more families to access high-quality child care, students across Maine will have access to environments where they can grow and thrive. Many studies have shown (such as those by the National Bureau of Economic Research) that children who experience high-quality child care leads to academic achievement, social-emotional development, and long-term health outcomes. I have seen this in my own experience. Allowing children these opportunities at young ages helps and gives them tools that they will use in their lives every day. Through this act, there are ways

in which students, especially those in lower-income families, could access high-quality child care that gives high-quality experiences. These experiences set students up for success, which I see in my classroom and beyond.

We also need to look at ways to support the incredible people working with these children daily. Working with children is such a rewarding experience that so many people want to do this but need to be able to live off of the wages they are making. These teachers are creating the foundation for children. We want to attract the best to teach our youngest learners, and they need to be compensated for their important work.

There are many places in Maine that are or are becoming "childcare deserts." I have had numerous family and friends that cannot find childcare or have to be on lists before their child is even born to solve the problem of how they continue working and have a safe place for their child to grow and be nurtured. People close to me have had to leave different jobs or take lower-paying jobs to care for their children. This has been a continually growing problem that is challenging to solve.

As an educator, I feel that if you see a problem, even a big one, there has to be a solution or many different solutions. One of the reasons I support this act is that there are tangible steps and outcomes. With your support of this act, I think Maine's children and families will be better set up for success.

Thank you for your time, the opportunity to testify, and for considering this in your deliberations.

Hillary Bellefleur

2022 Milken Educator

2021 Waldo County Teacher of the Year