

Melanie Tompkins
Mapleton
LD 1726

I am writing to you today in support of LD1726 An Act to Build Maine's Economy by Supporting Child Care for Working Families.

I am a working mother in Aroostook County with two young children. I work for a local mental health agency as a Home and Community Based Treatment Clinician, I have a master's degree in social work and am in a salaried position. My husband also works full-time in a salaried position for a local pre-cast concrete company. We are currently lucky enough to have high-quality childcare for our youngest so that we can both continue to contribute to our employers, our family, and our community.

We have had our difficulties with childcare, the first time being when our beloved in-home provider shut down during COVID and we had to depend on unreliable, temporary, and part-time family support. The second difficulty arose when we found out we were pregnant with our youngest; there were no openings available in the Presque Isle area, so we went on waitlists at a few months pregnant. After he was born, we continued to contact providers to no avail. I had to return to work on a part-time basis while utilizing an unlicensed, part-time friend. At almost a year old, we finally found an amazing provider in Caribou who could take him full time.

As a mom and licensed mental health professional, the piece-meal approach we had to utilize at times and may have to again in the future is very concerning; every piece of research shows the importance of consistent caregivers under the age of 5 for proper child development.

In my opinion as a mom and mental health professional, it is imperative for the state of Maine to address this childcare crisis. President Jackson's bill could have a significant impact for all working families in the state. Personally, if I or my husband had to leave our place of employment due to lack of childcare, we would be losing around \$600 per week. Aroostook County would lose 1 of the only 3 HCT providers; and my husband's employer would see a drastic reduction in productivity. I personally work hand-in-hand with high-risk families to try to maintain children in their homes and am the highest intensity service before we have to send our youth far distances for residential treatment. Pulling a mental health clinician from the field at this time would have substantial impact on our community.

This bill has the potential to increase wages for childcare providers, therefore leading to more stable schedules and more availability for working families. Our provider recently lost four employees due to wages. By using the cost of care model, it would allow for these underpaid, highly-valuable professionals to receive fair compensation. As someone who works in an underpaid profession, I feel passionate that our childcare providers deserve this long overdue raise.

The proposal to increase the subsidy would financially impact my family, as we currently spend about 14% of our income on childcare; paying more for one child to go to his provider than we do for our brand-new home. While our provider is absolutely worth the cost, there needs to be more support so that families like mine do not have to financially struggle to be sure their child receives proper care.

Thank you for your consideration.

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