



**Testimony of
Ben Freeman, Member
Professional Fire Fighters of Maine**

LD 1726 An Act to Build Maine's Economy by Supporting Child Care for Working Families

Senator Baldacci, Representative Myer and distinguished members of the Committee on Health & Human Services, good morning and thank you for the opportunity to appear before this committee today in support of LD 1726, “An Act to Build Maine's Economy by Supporting Child Care for Working Families.”

My name is Ben Freeman, I am a resident of Brookville, a Professional Firefighter/Paramedic employed by the Town of Ellsworth and a proud member of IAFF Local 3402 and the Professional Fire Fighters of Maine. In addition to representing my own personal interests in the passage of LD 1726, Michael Crouse, President of the Professional Fire Fighters of Maine requested that I also represent over 1,000 Professional Firefighters, Paramedics, EMTs & Dispatchers, especially those trying to raise a family in these tough economic times.

As a father of three (3) small children in a household with two (2) working parents, I can tell you firsthand, that one of the largest challenges my family and other working families throughout the State face today is access to “reliable and affordable” childcare. Even those families that are fortunate enough to afford childcare, it is a continued struggle to find childcare at all.

As you know, Maine is the oldest state in the country and our available labor pool is almost nonexistent. Not having access to childcare keeps Mainers out of the workforce and it makes it extremely difficult for people to raise a family here.

For my family, we are fortunate to have access to childcare for most of the week, but not every Wednesday as you can see! If I had to work a twenty-four (24) shift or was forced into work for overtime or on a call back for a working fire, my wife would have to take Personal Time Off (PTO) to take care of our children. Again, we are lucky, at the moment she has some PTO time saved for to utilize under these circumstances.

There are many other first responder families and other Maine working families that are not as fortunate as mine, because if they can't find childcare and do not have PTO or other work arounds to provided childcare, they cannot not work and if they don't work, they don't get paid and that just adds additional stress on our families.

When we asked our members, we heard back that childcare is a real problem for their families. The cost, the limited schedules, and the lack of spots all are clearly a big issue facing fire fighters across Maine.

LD 1726, An Act to Build Maine's Economy by Supporting Child Care for Working Families is a small step to incentivize more of Maine's people to seek careers in the childcare industry and ensure that Maine's working families finally have access to reliable & affordable childcare.

As you will no doubt hear in other testimony during this important hearing, I also believe that LD 1726 will also provide an economic gain for our state, by getting more people in Maine's workforce.

So, on behalf of my family, the families of our 1st Responders and all of Maine Working Families my family and the PFFMaine strongly urge your support and vote for the passage of LD 1726. I am happy to answer questions that you may have and would make myself available during the work session should the committee so desire.

Respectfully Submitted on this day, Wednesday, May 10th, 2023.

Ben Freeman, Member
IAFF Local 3402 & the Professional Fire Fighters of Maine