



OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
323 State Street, Augusta, ME 04330-7131
(207) 629-4000 | Fax (207) 629-4048 | mccs.me.edu

To: The Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
From: Becky Smith, Director of Government and Community Relations
RE: Testimony in Support of L.D. 1726, *An Act to Build Maine’s Economy by Supporting Child Care for Working Families*

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, please accept this testimony on behalf of the Maine Community College System and our six Early Care and Education Programs in support of LD 1726, *An Act to Build Maine’s Economy by Supporting Child Care for Working Families*.

Everyone deserves a strong start in life.

Maine’s community colleges are devoted to preparing our students for deeply meaningful work in early childhood education professions across the state. Over the past five years, approximately 400 students have graduated from our ECE programs and in 2021-22 academic year, 459 students enrolled in our ECE and certificate programs, up 22% from the prior year. These students and graduates are learning how to deliver high quality childcare to Maine’s youngest residents in all corners of our state.

Multiple colleges have on-site child care centers for students, faculty, staff and the wider community. This summer, EMCC will break ground on an expanded child care center in East Millinocket, supported by \$4 million in federal funds. This expansion will allow for hands-on learning while providing desperately needed childcare in the Millinocket area. Southern Maine Community College has an NAEYC-accredited center for children ages 3 to 5, which also provides a laboratory setting for students in the ECE program. At Kennebec Valley Community College, the Family Lab and Nature Exploration Center offers nature-based learning and early childhood STEAM activities. The center at Eastern Maine Community College offers Head Start services in partnership with Penquis Child Development and provides ECE students a laboratory setting. At Washington County Community College, the on-campus center offers priority placement for WCCC students and provides internship opportunities for ECE students.

However, despite all we are doing, it is not enough. We educate amazing childcare professionals, but many can’t afford to stay in the profession. This is not because their employers don’t appreciate their dedication and hard work; it is because their employers can’t afford to pay them the wages they need to stay in the profession they love without having to charge a rate that the parents in their communities just can’t afford. This is why we support any efforts to offer wage supports, child care subsidies, and increases to Head Start and other programs.

It is important to note that these supports would not only impact our ECE students, but many of our other students as well. Our students, like many working parents, struggle finding and affording child care. We do what we can with scholarships and our own centers, but we also have limited resources.

We would like to thank President Jackson for his commitment to the children of Maine and the people who educate and care for them every day.