

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services: my name is Patty Kidder and I live in Springvale, located in the City of Sanford. I am here today to testify in favor of LD 1726: An Act to Build Maine's Economy by Supporting Childcare for Working Families.

Maine is facing a serious child care crisis. We had a daycare shortage before the Pandemic started and many more closed during and immediately afterwards. The licensed child care centers and preschools that remain open are struggling to find and retain qualified early childhood educators due to low pay (and probably no affordable housing but that's a different bill).

My daughter, following the advice of a close friend, put my grandson on several daycare waiting lists shortly after conception. He is two and a half years old and his name hasn't come up yet over 3 years later. Fortunately, her mother-in-law and I were able to take care of him so she could go back to work last year. She finally found child care she could afford through a coworker at a completely different daycare but it is only part time. There just isn't enough affordable child care available in our area for the number of growing families.

LD 1726 will help by its multi-faceted approach. Helping to make more Maine families eligible for significant help paying for childcare and free Head Start programs is just one piece of the solution. This bill would help providers pay their qualified workers a living wage which will help them hire and retain more early childhood educators. This bill will help increase the number of licensed childcare slots available and decrease the out of pocket expense many families will need to pay to access them.

I have heard many people say no one wants to work today and that why there's a worker shortage but I know that's not true for most people. A couple of other reasons are that the homeless can't work until they have stable housing. No clean clothes, no shower, etc. and that is a different bill with a different committee but the other reason is No Childcare. Single parents and couples can't both work without quality licensed daycare for their children and LD 1726 will help fix the childcare shortage. I urge you to please vote in favor of LD 1726: An Act to Build Maine's Economy by Supporting Childcare for Working Families.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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