



PORTLAND
Regional Chamber
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Testimony in Support of LD 1726-An Act to Build Maine's Economy by Supporting Child Care for Working Families

Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
May 10, 2023

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and members of the Committee on Health and Human Services,

I am Eamonn Dundon, Director of Advocacy for the Portland Regional Chamber of Commerce. We represent 1,300 businesses in our region who collectively employ over 65,000 Mainers. We are submitting this testimony today to express our strongest support for LD 1726.

We believe the title of this bill is not just effective marketing, but a true statement. The investments in the bill will build Maine's economy by supporting workers and providers in the childcare industry, while expanding access to high-quality childcare for all working families in our state. I would like to take my time today to walk you through why the lack of high-quality affordable childcare is such an acute challenge for Maine's economic development prospects.

In 2020, 2021 and again this year, we worked with Starting Strong, a Portland based coalition focused on establishing the building blocks for lifetime learning, to survey our membership and determine the impact of the lack of childcare on the business community in our region. We surveyed businesses from small storefronts with a handful of workers up to some of the largest employers in the state and the results were clear: a lack of childcare is a significant impediment to hiring, training, and retaining employees and the current programs in place are insufficient to address this overwhelming need.

In fact, 82% of our members reported that their employees have trouble finding childcare, up from 70% just before the pandemic in 2020. This translates into real business impediments that undermine our economic development efforts at the state and local levels. 88% of our members reported that their employees experience unplanned work absences due to lack of childcare, and nearly 65% reported that lack of childcare has caused issues with employee retention, up from 46% just one year ago. When we asked our members who identified lack of childcare as a problem for their business, 95% cited availability and affordability as the biggest barriers their employees face in finding childcare, both of which are directly addressed by the provisions of this bill.

We cannot to address issues around programmatic availability and affordability unless we invest the in the most critical component of any system: people. Childcare workers and businesses in Maine have been undercompensated for decades, despite possessing the degrees and expertise needed to care for our youngest residents. This has led to high turnover and burnout among these professionals, further limiting childcare slots and presenting many challenges to those looking to open or expand a childcare program.

For these reasons we ask that you support these important investments in workers who do so much to hold up our economy and Maine families. Thank you for your time today, and, on behalf of the Portland Regional Chamber I ask that you please support LD 1726.