



126 Sewall Street  
Augusta, ME 04330-6822  
TTY/Voice: (207) 626-7058  
Fax: (207) 621-8148  
www.mejp.org

Maine Equal Justice  
People Policy Solutions

**Ann Danforth**  
Policy Advocate  
(207) 626-7058 x216  
adanforth@mejp.org

**Testimony on Behalf of Maine Equal Justice *in support of* LD 1726, An Act to Build Maine's Economy by Supporting Child Care for Working Families**

May 10, 2023

Good morning Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and members of the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Ann Danforth and I use she/her pronouns. I'm a Policy Advocate at Maine Equal Justice, a nonprofit legal aid provider working to increase economic security, opportunity, and equity for people in Maine.

**Quality, affordable child care and early learning is critical to helping Maine families achieve economic security and opportunity.**

Even before the pandemic, a shortage of quality, affordable child care and early learning was one of the most common barriers to finding and keeping a job for parents with low income. Close to 70% of Maine children under the age of six live in households in which all parents are working, according to the most recent data available<sup>1</sup>. We know that if these parents don't have access to child care, they can't go to work. In addition to the shortage of supply, parents also face the significant barrier of affordability. According to the most recent Kids Count Databook, the average cost of infant care in Maine is \$11,700. When compared to other household expenses, child care can exceed housing costs and college tuition.<sup>2</sup>

**Quality child care and early learning help set children up for success**

In addition to enabling parents to work, high-quality early learning experiences are important in their own right. These experiences help set children on a path to success in school, leading to higher

---

1

<https://datacenter.aecf.org/data/tables/5057-children-under-age-6-with-all-available-parents-in-the-labor-force?loc=1&loct=1#detailed/2/21/false/2048,1729,37,871,870,869,36,868,867,133/any/11472,11473>

2

[https://info.childcareaware.org/hubfs/2021%20Price%20of%20Care%20State%20Sheets/Maine\\_Price%20Fact%20Sheet%202021.pdf](https://info.childcareaware.org/hubfs/2021%20Price%20of%20Care%20State%20Sheets/Maine_Price%20Fact%20Sheet%202021.pdf)

education and a career, with low income children and English language learners benefiting the most.<sup>3</sup> Programs that begin at birth lead to better outcomes for children and yield up to a 13% annual return on public investment.<sup>4</sup> Our state's future prosperity and workforce depend on our youngest children getting what they need to learn, grow, thrive, and become the adults who will strengthen our communities and build our economy.

### **LD 1726 would benefit children, families, and employers**

This bill would help begin to address the child care crisis in our state and move us towards the laudable goal of limiting child care costs within the next ten years so that families are not paying more than 7% of their income towards child care. It would increase eligibility and access to the Child Care Subsidy Program, a hugely beneficial program for families with low- to moderate-incomes in the state. It would also speed up the eligibility determinations, which we hear from clients can be a barrier to being able to start at a new job. The bill would also require a report that evaluates the program and makes recommendations as to how the state could increase enrollment and reduce barriers to families receiving child care subsidies.

Critically, this bill also provides funding to double the monthly wage supplement for all child care workers – the workforce behind our workforce.

### **Conclusion**

We support LD 1726 because it helps to ensure parents and caregivers have access to quality, affordable child care and early learning so they can sustain employment while providing their children with the support and learning necessary for healthy development and long term success. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of this bill.

---

<sup>3</sup>

<http://www.srca.org/policy-media/policy-updates/meet-ings-briefings/investing-our-future-evidence-base-practice-school-and>  
[https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/Building\\_Blocks\\_Early\\_Childhood\\_Education\\_04202016.pdf](https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/Building_Blocks_Early_Childhood_Education_04202016.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.mekids.org/site/assets/files/2031/2023\\_kidscount\\_databook\\_interactive.pdf](https://www.mekids.org/site/assets/files/2031/2023_kidscount_databook_interactive.pdf) and [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=2892417](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2892417)