



PUBLIC HEARING TESTIMONY  
IN SUPPORT OF LD 1726

May 18, 2023

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

Committee on Health and Human Services

**Submitted by Michael McKernan, Director, Government and Community Relations,  
The Jackson Laboratory**

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and members of the Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Mike McKernan. I am Director of Government and Community Relations at The Jackson Laboratory and a resident of Bar Harbor. I'm here to testify in support of LD 1726, an act to strengthen Maine's child care workforce and support working families.

The Jackson Laboratory employs 1,701 people in Maine, including at our headquarters in Bar Harbor, the Charles E. Hewett Center in Ellsworth, and the Maine Cancer Genomics Initiative in Augusta. JAX is the largest employer across Hancock, Waldo, and Washington counties. My dedicated colleagues work every day to advance the JAX mission to *discover precise genomic solutions for disease and empower the global biomedical community in the shared quest to improve human health.*

JAX is a major contributor to the economic vitality of Maine, both now and in the future. In 2022, JAX operations, capital building projects and on-site education programs supported \$312 million in earnings and 4,130 jobs (including 1,590 JAX employees plus 2,540 indirectly created and induced by JAX spending); in the same year, the Laboratory paid \$60 million to almost 600 Maine businesses and sole providers of goods and services to support these activities. Since 2018, JAX has added 245 new employees from out-of-state, with an average annual attraction of out-of-state workers of 3% of its total workforce that, in Maine, live in 140 towns and 15 counties.

The ability of the JAX workforce to advance our biomedical mission is significantly predicated on the availability of high quality, proximal and affordable child care. For this reason, JAX has prioritized child care, investing nearly \$10 million to construct centers in Ellsworth and Bar Harbor, both operated in partnership with the Downeast Family YMCA. The Ellsworth center opened in 2017 and currently serves about 90 children of which 30% are the children of JAX employees. The Bar Harbor center, which is slated to open in early 2024, will serve up to 50 children. Despite the physical capacity of both centers, which combined can accommodate 150 children, their actual capacity is determined by staffing. The Ellsworth center is currently understaffed and the Bar Harbor center, given the constraints of the child care labor market and in anticipation of hiring challenges ahead, has already started to recruit.

Child care providers—the workforce behind the workforce—is the primary reason The Jackson Laboratory supports this bill. With caring, well-trained and appropriately compensated staff, JAX

parents can come to work knowing that their children will be safe, well cared for and educated. LD 1726 will help close a glaring pay gap between early childhood educators and workers in almost every other profession. According to a September 2021 report by the U.S. Treasury, child care workers, as a sector, earn in the second percentile of all occupations. Thus, 98% of all other workers in the U.S. make more than child care workers.

Senator Jackson's bill is a corrective action that will support child care providers, will increase capacity in child care centers and will help make child care affordable to more Maine families. This legislation is fundamental to our success as a state and we urge your support.