



United Way
of Southern Maine

LIVE UNITED

Testimony In Support of LD 1726: An Act to Build Maine's Economy by Supporting Child Care for Working Families

May 10, 2023

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. my name is Ninette Irabaruta, and I am the Director of Public Policy and Advocacy at United Way of Southern Maine (UWSM). I am here today on behalf of all the United Ways in Maine to express our support for LD 1726, a bill that would improve the existing child care subsidy program and aims to provide funding to increase eligibility and wages for child care services.

The Covid-19 pandemic made it incredibly clear that our early childhood education (ECE) providers are essential to establishing a strong foundation for learning in our children, but also that they are the backbone of the American workforce. In these unprecedented times of turbulence brought about by the global pandemic, child care providers must manage the increasingly complex social, emotional, and behavioral needs of our youngest learners. Doubling the monthly wage supplement for these early childcare educators is essential. If our aim is to attract and retain high-quality teachers to lead our students through the most pivotal years of their development, this is a step we must take to further professionalize the ECE career path.

Another aspect of LD 1726 that we believe to be pivotal is the expansion of the existing child care subsidy program. Access to reliable childcare is often one of the key barriers that keeps caregivers out of the workforce, and families struggling in poverty. Expanding the subsidy eligibility to 125% state median income will provide greater access to high-quality child care opportunities like Head Start—which has consistently proven to promote increased school readiness when it comes to language acquisition, and social and emotional growth among our learners from low-income households. It is our view that when both of these elements are considered together—increased wages and greater subsidy eligibility—it will make significant improvements to our ECE system.

All the United Ways in Maine support LD 1726 because we believe deeply that investing in our child care professionals and bolstering access to high-quality learning opportunities will move the needle when it comes to giving our deserving children a strong start. For these reasons, we respectfully encourage you to support and pass LD 1726.

Thank you for your leadership and service.