



Testimony of Women United In support of LD 1726: An Act to Build Maine's Economy by Supporting Child Care and Working Families

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Alexandra Turnbull, and I am the manager of Women United, a giving circle that is part of United Way of Southern Maine. I am here to testify on behalf of Women United in support of LD 1726: An Act to Build Maine's Economy by Supporting Child Care and Working Families.

Women United is a group of community members who set out to support and lift up other women. With a focus on the advancement of single mothers and their children in Southern Maine, we use philanthropy, volunteerism, and advocacy to positively influence single mothers' abilities to meet basic needs and find financial stability, secure high-quality education and care for children, and achieve optimal health and well-being.

The child care crisis that our state is currently in undeniably affects most parents. However, data shows that it impacts mothers far more than fathers, and single mothers with disproportion. According to the most recent Maine Community Action Partnership (MECAP) statewide needs assessment, 21% of households in Maine are single-parent (compared to 14% nationally): single mothers represent a significant percentage of the population.¹

Getting a child care spot has become nearly impossible in Maine. "Wait lists" typically have hundreds of families seeking care and often require years of waiting. This is true for both Head Start and center-based care. When a family finally gets a spot, they then must deal with the high turnover that is prevalent in the industry, which is extremely disruptive to children and relatedly impacts parents. Raising child care educator wages will show these vital professionals that they are valued by our society. Boosting pay will increase the ability of the individuals who work in child care to stay in their positions and thrive personally as well as professionally, which benefits the economy and families who use care. Offering paid child care for workers' children will make working in the industry actually feasible for single mothers and could drive young women into the workforce, which Maine needs.

Affordability is a barrier. On average, the annual cost of center-based infant care in Maine is 55% of the median income for a single mother. Combined with sky-rocketing housing and food prices how can we expect families to ever break the cycle of generational poverty? One of the biggest things we hear from single mothers in the programs we invest in is that they can never get ahead. They get caught in a cycle of needing resources (such as TANF or CCSP) and get a boost from having the resource, but then immediately lose the resource if they try to save money to become more permanently financially stable. Additionally, the dynamic of the middle-class shrinking and poverty rates increasing leaves many lower-middle income families disqualified from resources such as CCSP but unable to afford necessary living expenses like child care. Expanding the eligibility for both childcare subsidies and Head Start are logical

¹ Maine Community Action Partnership (MECAP), & Crescendo Consulting. (2021, December). *2021 Statewide Community Needs Assessment*. Maine Community Action Partnership (MECAP). <https://mecap.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/CNA-at-a-Glance-FINAL-1.31.22.pdf>



choices to combat this. Making both programs more accessible and faster to benefit from are essential pieces of expanding their availability.

Much of the above I have learned through the work of Women United, but I feel I would be remiss if I did not note my personal experience. I have two small children both in child care and all of the above rings true for my family. We waited almost two years to get into the child care center we are at now. We pay more than our mortgage for their care each month and regularly discuss if I should leave the workforce to care for our children: the cost of their care is so exorbitant, my employment isn't all that lucrative. I'm fortunate to have a partner to share in these costs and give me more options, but some mothers aren't.

Many of the single mothers that Women United programming support came to their roles through untenable situations such as a partner passing away. These mothers need our state to support them for their families to thrive. They deserve the opportunity to access high-quality, affordable child care, so they can engage in their community and support the local economy through employment, and so their children can build the life-long foundation for success gained from participating in high-quality early education. Please support LD 1726: it can truly make a difference for Maine families.

Thank you for your consideration and time,

Women United