

Testimony offered on behalf of LD2199

**Colleen J. Quint
President & CEO
Alfond Scholarship Foundation
Portland, ME
February 20, 2024**

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. Thank you for the opportunity to share this testimony with you.

My name is Colleen Quint and I am the President & CEO of the Alfond Scholarship Foundation. Our My Alfond Grant program awards \$500 at birth to every baby born a Maine resident for their future education after high school. To date, over \$75m has been awarded to more than 150,000 Maine children.

I also serve as chair of the Strong Foundations strand of MaineSpark, and it is in that capacity that I offer this testimony today. MaineSpark is a business-education initiative that seeks to boost Maine's educational attainment rate for credentials of value to 60% by 2025. The Strong Foundations strand focuses on Maine children from birth through 5th grade.

I write today in support of LD2199, Senate President Jackson's Bill: An Act to Ensure Subsidy Reimbursements and Emergency Financial Assistance for Certain Child Care Providers.

Knowing that Maine needs a more educated workforce, not just by 2025 but long into the future, the kind of early care and education received by Maine's youngest citizens is of critical importance. That kind of "strong foundation" leads to positive outcomes for children and sets them on a path for adulthood.

We know that quality and accessible early care and education also means that parents are able to more fully participate in the workforce and their own educational advancement. Shortages in childcare availability have real impacts not only in homes but on the state as a whole.

The two main elements of Sen. Jackson's bill – reimbursement to child care providers, and providing emergency funds to keep providers open – address important needs for the child care workforce, which is a workforce under great stress. Over 1,000 child care educators are needed to meet current demand.

Currently, reimbursement from the state to providers is based on attendance rather than enrollment. While at first blush that approach may seem appropriate, the reality is that it means providers are penalized financially when a child is out sick, even though their fixed costs remain the same. This policy costs providers statewide nearly \$5m each year. A shift to reimbursement based on enrollment would ensure more equitable and more consistent reimbursement to providers.

Many child care providers operate on margins of less than 1%, which means that it doesn't take much to tip things out of balance. The proposed creation of a new emergency fund – a fund which would come with technical assistance – would help smooth out unexpected costs and help keep doors open. While the details on how the funds would be distributed are still being worked out, at a conceptual level this kind of resource would, again, provide relief and support to providers who face many pressures in their efforts to provide quality and accessible early care and education.

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I want to acknowledge the many positive strides made both through policy and investment in the early care and education space during the past few years: infrastructure grants to support creation/expansion of child care facilities; monthly stipends to child care workers through child care stabilization grants to address workforce recruitment and retention; support for families through expansion of eligibility for assistance; and support for the early care and education system.

These efforts are without doubt making a positive difference. But it is also the case that more needs to be done. Maine cannot afford to lose child care providers - and therefore slots - because of financial pressures. LD2199 provides a safety valve to providers and the families they serve. This means that children get the quality early care and education they need and deserve, parents are able to more fully participate in the workforce and pursue their own education advancement, and employers have the workforce they need today and tomorrow.

Thank you.