

Testimony of Jade Lebel

*LD 437, Act Directing the Department of Education to Develop Pilot Programs to Place
Child Care Facilities in Selected School Administrative Units*

In Support of the bill

March 14, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Jade Lebel, I am a resident of Gray and a former educator for MSAD 17. I am testifying today in support of LD 437.

I worked in the Oxford Hills School district as a first grade teacher from the fall of 2016 until the spring of 2022. During that time, I obtained my masters degree and became a certified literacy specialist. I also gave birth to my first daughter in December of 2020, and continued to work while she went to daycare. During the 2022-2023 academic year, I worked in the same school as an interventionist. I had my second daughter in March of 2023. When I went out on maternity leave, I had every intention of returning to work the following school year. However, when we sat down and looked at the numbers, I realized that childcare was going to be $\frac{2}{3}$ of my salary. The cost for my two children to attend daycare was going to be \$30,000 a year, and I was only going to be making \$45,000 as a Masters level professional with 7 years of experience. So, I made the really hard decision to leave a job I loved and stay home with my daughters.

My story is not uncommon. Teaching is grueling work, and is especially tough on parents. Teacher retention is something that the school district I worked in really struggles with. The year that I left, I was one of 12 staff members in my school who chose to move on to something else. Due to teacher turnover, it was not uncommon for a student to make it to the 4th grade before they had a veteran teacher. This is a problem. I can tell you that the quality of my own teaching in my first two years was sub-par compared to my teaching in later years. Students who encounter new teachers year after year, especially in early grades where the foundations of literacy are being taught, suffer greatly compared to their peers who consistently have veteran teachers. It is for this reason that it's extremely important to retain teachers.

I know that teacher retention is a problem everywhere, but it is especially felt in districts with lower pay scales. It is hard to attract teachers to districts like MSAD 17, when they can drive 30 minutes south and make \$20,000-\$30,000 more a year. It's even harder to keep young mothers in these districts with childcare costs as high as they are. The program that this bill proposes would not only attract teachers to these types of districts, but also help retain them. If there had been free, or reduced, childcare in my school district, I would still be working. If I could find a school district near me that offered this program now, I'd be applying to work there for the upcoming school year.

Teachers are leaving the profession in droves. There are teacher shortages everywhere. I firmly believe that this program would help alleviate that shortage and bring teachers back into the workforce. This would benefit our children, our teachers, and our economy.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today, and share my personal experience with you. I sincerely hope that this bill is passed and that these pilot programs are set up in the school districts that need it most.