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Representative Gary Drinkwater
Maine House of Representatives
2 State House Sta, Augusta, ME 04333

Subject: LD 174

Dear Representative Drinkwater,

I am writing to share the profound impact that LD 798 has had on both my business and the families in our local community. As the founder and director of Nature Play All Day, a licensed nature-based child care program in Knox County, I have witnessed firsthand the devastating consequences of this legislation on families seeking early childhood education.

Nature Play All Day opened its doors in June 2024 with a waitlist of 47 families from Knox, Waldo, and Lincoln counties and beyond. Despite their eagerness to enroll, not a single one of these families met eligibility requirements due to their decision not to vaccinate their children for personal, religious, or philosophical reasons. Over the past ten months, I have had to turn away more than 20 families who were otherwise an excellent fit for our nature-based program, solely because of this restriction.

This is not just an issue for my program—this law bars families from any licensed childcare setting in the state, including daycares, public schools, private schools, and charter schools. As a result, families are left with no options, and childcare providers feel the weight of these limitations. I know of many passionate educators and caregivers who are now forced to operate “under the radar” or in the gray areas of regulation just to provide care to families who desperately need it. These providers take on tremendous risk, as operating outside of licensing regulations puts them in danger of fines if discovered and eliminates any possibility of receiving staff stipends or state funding.

This creates an overwhelming challenge for early childhood service providers who are already overworked and underpaid, yet continue to show up every day for the good of children and families. We do this work because we believe in the right of every child to have access to quality care and a strong sense of belonging within their community. However, the current system is making it nearly impossible to serve families in need while maintaining both financial and legal security.

I have relentlessly pursued every possible avenue to structure my program in a way that allows me to remain licensed while still serving these families, but time and again, I have been met with roadblocks. The reality is that families in Maine are being denied not only quality childcare but also the support, stability, and community that they rightly deserve.

As a business owner, educator, and advocate for accessible early childhood education, I urge you to consider the real and lasting effects this law has on families and small childcare providers like myself. It is my hope that Maine can create pathways for inclusion while maintaining safety and quality care for all children.

Childcare providers should not have to choose between following the law and serving their communities. Families should not have to sacrifice their livelihoods because they cannot access care. This law is not just limiting options—it is dismantling the very foundation of support that children and families rely on.

I appreciate your time and dedication to the well-being of Maine's families and children. I welcome the opportunity to discuss this further and share more about the experiences of the families affected.

With gratitude,

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