

Testimony of Charlotte Jacobs, Scarborough, Maine

Program Director, Seedlings to Sunflowers

In support of LD LD 483, "An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue to Secure Prosperity for Maine Families and Businesses."

Thank you, Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, and esteemed members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee. My name is Charlotte Jacobs, and I am here to express my strong support for LD 483, "An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue to Secure Prosperity for Maine Families and Businesses." This bill represents a vital investment in Maine's workforce and economic growth, particularly through its focus on strengthening childcare infrastructure, which is critical for families, businesses, and communities across our state.

Having worked in Early Childhood Education (ECE) for 14 years, I've witnessed both the successes and struggles within the field. I can say with certainty that without funding like that proposed in this bill, our field faces an uncertain future.

As Maine moves forward in its recovery and growth, ensuring that families have access to high-quality, affordable childcare is more important than ever. Many parents face barriers in securing appropriate childcare, and this bill offers a much-needed solution. I am confident that this legislation will alleviate some of the pressure on both businesses and parents by providing the infrastructure necessary to expand access to quality care. Without continued investment, the quality of care will inevitably decline, leading to more health and safety concerns in childcare environments, which will require the State of Maine Child Care Licensing to intervene, diverting attention from other critical matters. This cycle is not just a local issue but a nationwide one. Investing in the future of our children is a clear choice, and knowing that this investment will pay dividends for Maine's economy only reinforces that it is the right decision.

By allocating \$100 million for childcare infrastructure grants, LD 483 will directly support the growth and improvement of childcare facilities, which are an essential resource for working families. The bill's provision for both large- and small-scale projects ensures that a variety of organizations—whether businesses, municipalities, nonprofits, or others—will have access to funding to invest in their communities. The matching fund requirement encourages private sector participation, ensuring that public and private entities work together to address the childcare crisis and bolster Maine's economy. Moreover, exempting smaller projects from this matching requirement allows for the growth of smaller family childcare businesses, which are essential to our state's childcare infrastructure. These small-scale improvements can have a significant impact.

The bill's built-in transparency, requiring annual public reports on the program's impact on childcare capacity and workforce participation, is particularly appreciated. This commitment to transparency shows good faith and reinforces that those of us in the ECE sector will ensure the

program remains accountable and responsive to the needs of the families and businesses it serves.

By supporting the construction, retrofitting, and renovation of childcare facilities, LD 483 will help meet the increasing demand for childcare services. This is not just about caring for our children—it's about ensuring that Maine's economy can continue to grow and thrive as more parents can fully engage in the workforce. In today's economy, it's rare to find a family that isn't reliant on both parents working. Now, more than ever, the State's support is needed to maintain high-quality childcare services for Maine's families and children. Each week, we see more family childcare providers and centers close their doors. We can't afford to wait any longer.

For all these reasons, I urge you to support LD 483 and help create a more prosperous future for Maine's families, businesses, and communities.

Thank you for your time and consideration.