

Carol Amanda Tobey  
Arundel  
LD 1566

Senator Baldacci, Representative Salisbury, and Esteemed Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. My name is Carol Amanda Tobey, and I am a resident of Arundel a person with lived experience related to this bill / an advocate for Parent Ambassadors. I am here today to speak in support of LD 1566, which would require compensation for individuals who share their lived experiences to inform public policy.

For too long, individuals with lived experience have been asked to show up—to share deeply personal stories, give feedback, serve on panels, or advise on policies—with little or no compensation. Yet our perspectives are vital. They provide real-world insights that professionals and systems often overlook. This bill acknowledges a fundamental truth: Lived experience is expertise. And expertise deserves to be paid.

I am a mother of five girls, three of which still are young and living with me. I have been through a lot in life and I'm learning how to safely advocate for my children. I have many lived experiences. I was blessed being able to go to Washington to share my opinions on early Head-start issues and how it affected my life. I was compensative for my time and was very fortunate for that. Washington was rather expensive more than I anticipated with my five girls money is something that is very tight even though my two oldest are older and not living with me they still expect Mom to help out. Because of early Headstart and learning how to advocate for myself through parent ambassadors I was able to finish high school after 13 years on and of. Now I am going to be a sophomore in college in the fall and have completed my first year in the criminal justice program at SMCC.

It is amazing feeling when I'm able to have an extra \$25 in my account to go towards bills whether it is for my household or trying to help out my two oldest. Participating in the parent ambassador program. I was lucky to be able to get \$100 a day for childcare coverage so I could attend by myself and focus on learning and the opportunities that I could obtain.

I have been raising children on and off since I was 20 and 10 years later I had more unexpectedly, but was so blessed. I am a mother that chooses to stay at home with my children until they're able to go to early Headstart or pre-K. Childcare is super expensive and working would just have went straight to that, but because of wait lists most of my children never had the opportunity to go to early Headstart. Though two of them were able to go to pre-K while one was fortunate enough for to attend early Headstart so I could finish my high school diploma and only be away for short periods of time throughout the day.

If I didn't have opportunities like this, I do not think I would be where I am today.

Today I'm in college in a criminal justice program. Something that I thought I would never achieve. Focusing on my dreams to show my children that they can do anything in life no matter how long and how hard it is. Right now I'm on the path for my associates degree with a future plan of my bachelors degree because of the opportunities that I have had and the payments I have received to help this has made it easier.

This bill sets a clear standard: if you are asking for our time, our insight, and our vulnerability, you must also offer fair compensation. This is not only about equity—it's about sustainability. Many of us are navigating difficult circumstances. Compensation makes it possible for us to keep showing up, and it sends a powerful message that our knowledge is just as valuable as any professional credential.

I urge you to support LD 1566. Valuing lived experience includes valuing our time, our expertise, and our labor. This bill helps create more equitable, inclusive, and effective systems—and it starts by paying people for what they know.

Thank you for your time and consideration.