

Susan A. Radway EdD
soozar615@gmail.com
Bethel, ME 02417

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Dear Senator Ingwersen, Representative Mayer, and honorable committee members:

My name is Susan Radway. I live in Bethel and am writing in support of LD 1955, LD 1736, and LD 1859 to improve access to quality, affordable childcare and increase these services.

As an Early Childhood Consultant, and retired Executive Director of a 120-slot non-profit child care center, I have firsthand knowledge of the struggles of families to find quality child care and make a living wage, while paying for the cost of childcare. For families that do find care, many question the feasibility of continuing to be a two-wage family, as the cost of care takes most of their second income.

The lack of childcare in the Bethel area, led my husband and I to develop a retirement plan to relocate to Bethel so that we could provide childcare, should it be needed, when our daughter's family decided to have children. We were able to move to Maine in 2024, shortly after our granddaughter was born. For the past year, I have provided full-time childcare for her while both parents' work. They have been on a wait list for childcare since early in the pregnancy and now anticipate an opening in September, but it is still not guaranteed. While they explored the option of a subsidized slot, they would only qualify if one of them quit their job.

I asked my daughter what the impact the lack of childcare was on her family. She said, *Mom, there was no good choice. If you were not available to provide care we would have had to consider 1) delaying pregnancy (not a great plan for parents in their 30s), 2) one of us would have had to quit our job, or 3) we would have to decide not have children. If quitting one of our jobs was the only option to have a child, we would need to receive state assistance through WIC, SNAP and other state benefits in order to pay our basic bills.* FYI-One parent is a teacher and one is a carpenter. Neither earn a wage that would allow them to become a one-income family.

Quality, affordable childcare is critical. It provides the foundation for developing the social-emotional and school-readiness skills needed for children to enter kindergarten ready to be successful life-long learners. It is also critical for supporting a strong workforce. No childcare? No workers!

Affordable, quality childcare is a necessity. It is critical for supporting a strong Maine workforce. Childcare workers do not earn enough money to support themselves, or their family (even as the second wage earner in the family). Nor do they earn enough money to pay for their own childcare needs. As workers leave and replacements can not be found centers close. Again, no childcare? No workers! Maine's workforce is impacted by the lack of childcare. Fair pay and a live able wage for childcare workers is critical to turn this crisis around.