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Dear HHS Committee Chairs Sen. Henry Ingwersen and Rep. Michele Meyer and Committee,

I support the childcare workforce bill. My name is Laura Larson, and I am the executive director of a nonprofit childcare agency in midcoast Maine. I have over 30 years of experience in the field of early childhood care and education (ECCE) in various roles. Our agency has the capacity to expand, but we are struggling to find qualified staff to do so. It is crucial that we improve the ECCE workforce now, as it will take time to see real progress. I have teachers who are nearing retirement age, and there are no new educators entering the field to take their place. The ECCE sector is in crisis, and it urgently needs support.

Maine's economy and future investments require a strong foundation. We need to build upon what makes Maine great: family and community. Raising a family should never be a stressful financial burden, and every child deserves the same opportunity for a quality start in life. Access to quality early childhood education is not a privilege; it is a right that should begin at birth, not just at five years old.

To build a robust economic system in Maine, we need a well-trained workforce. However, our workforce faces challenges due to balancing family and financial responsibilities. Many adults decide to limit their family size or choose not to have children because of the financial pressures associated with child-rearing, including the cost of childcare, which enables them to work.

We live in a society where many adults must work, and the economy relies on them to meet job demands and fund state resources. It is essential to understand that we are not simply paying for someone else's childcare; we are investing in the future of hygienists, nurses, police officers, teachers, welders, waiters, and waitresses, all of whom contribute to the economy and support our community's needs.

The childcare industry cannot grow or thrive without a qualified, compensated workforce unless we want services to be unaffordable for families. I urge the state to support efforts that create a strong foundation for economic growth by investing in the workforce behind the workforce.

Thank you, your consideration of these matters is very much appreciated,

Laura L. Larson Ed.D.

Executive Director

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