

Written Testimony in Support of S.P. 763/LD 1955 In Senate, May 7, 2025: **An Act to Increase Child Care Affordability and Early Childhood Educator Stability**

My name is George Bernstein. I am a full-time resident of Rangeley, Maine and I represent the Beth Brunswick Memorial Fund for Children. We are currently building what will be the only licensed childcare facility within a 35 mile radius of Rangeley, Maine. Our organization is focused on bringing affordable childcare to our community, improving school readiness and helping families enter the workforce or extend their employment hours in order to support the local economy. As background, I was the CEO of Nobel Learning Communities, a for-profit operator of 190 childcare center/preschools and 35 K-5/K-8/K-12 private schools. I also sit on the Board of Directors of a top 10 U.S. child care provider, the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest provider of child care in Australia, and a national operator of K-12 schools for children with social emotional learning disabilities.

This testimony is in *SUPPORT* of S.P. 763 In Senate, May 7, 2025, **An Act to Increase Child Care Affordability and Early Childhood Educator Stability**. The passage of this bill is necessary to provide immediate access to CCAP funds so that families can afford quality, licensed childcare in Rangeley and the surrounding communities. Without immediate access, families in Rangeley and the surrounding areas will not be able to afford child care.

The passage of this bill will enhance the economic outlook for Rangeley and the surrounding communities *by ensuring the viability of affordable child care* in what is currently a child care desert. This in turn, will allow young families to remain in the area and will enhance Rangeley's attraction for new families. By keeping our young families and attracting new families, we can support the area's primary economic engine: Tourism.

1. Accelerating the time in which families can receive CCAP/child care subsidies is the only way that Rangeley area families can utilize child care. This in turn, will assure the long term viability of the new child care center in Rangeley.
  - a. Franklin County poverty rate is 31% higher than the statewide average (Franklin = 13.6%, ME = 10.4%) [U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Franklin County, Maine](#).
  - b. The median HH income for families in Rangeley is just over \$56,000, slightly lower than the Median in Franklin County.
  - c. In our 2023 survey of Rangeley area families, the number one reason for not putting a child in child care was affordability. The number 2 reason was lack of child care access/slots. Building our child care center solves the child care access/slots problem. However, without immediate access to CCAP funding, families cannot afford to place their children in child care.

- d. Our facility will be licensed so that it can accept CCAP funds. If CCAP funds are quickly available to families, it ensures the viability of child care in Rangeley. If families are forced to wait for access to CCAP funds, they will not enroll and our facility will not be sustainable.
  - e. Current CCAP wait list includes 630 children; the funding in his bill (\$4.8mm) would cover over 550 children and allow quicker access to CCAP funds;
- 2. Access and affordability of child care will expand the local Labor Force Participation Rate, retain and attract young families to the area, and increase and workforce availability to support growth in tourism, the area's only economic engine.
  - a. Franklin County unemployment rate is 11% higher than the statewide average (Franklin = 4.2%, ME = 3.8%) [Unemployment and Labor Force Estimates | CWRI](#). The lack of affordable child care contributes greatly to the ability of parents to work.
  - b. The median age in Rangeley is 56, almost 25% higher than the Maine average. [Rangeley town, Franklin County, ME - Profile data - Census Reporter](#). We simply cannot attract young families (or get young families to remain in the area) without providing affordable child care.
  - c. After being closed for five years, Saddleback Mountain has re-opened, with an ownership group that is committed to help create financially-sustainable community infrastructure projects in underserved rural towns across the U.S. Saddleback has created more than 250 jobs in the winter and 50 year-round jobs on the mountain, but cannot find employees to fill many of those roles. This has created the need for new restaurants, shops and inns to be open year-round, exacerbating the labor shortage.
  - d. Rangeley simply does not have the available labor to support the current level of tourism, let alone growth. Having affordable child care during the day would dramatically increase available labor availability. *In our 2023 survey of Rangeley residents, over 70% of respondents said that having affordable childcare would allow them to: enter the work force, expand the hours they could work, or enter a job training program.*
    - i. During the 2024/2025 skiing season, Saddleback was materially hampered by a labor shortage;
    - ii. Rangeley has approximately 15 restaurants. Because of a labor shortage, most restaurants are open only 4 or 5 days a week and they typically open only for a four hour period for dinner. The few that provide lunch service, only serve lunch 1 or 2 days per week. These hours are not due to demand, but to staffing shortages.

3. Affordable child care will improve school readiness for the children in the area.
  - a. Prior to preschool age, there are no facilities in the Rangeley area that deliver developmentally appropriate early age education/curriculum. Additionally, there are not facilities or programs that can identify early intervention service needs for children younger than preschool age.
  - b. The children in rural Maine communities begin their educational journey well behind their peers from wealthier and more populated communities who have child care with early age developmentally appropriate curriculum. The lack of early education and early intervention services provided in a licensed child care facility puts rural children behind at an early age.

For all the reasons stated above, passage of S.P. 763/LD 1955 will provide families with affordable child care, assure the viability of the only licensed child care facility within 35 miles, expand the local labor force, and improve school readiness. All this will dramatically improve the economic outlook of what is currently defined as an economically disadvantaged area.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input into this very important issue for the Rangeley area, Franklin County, and the State of Maine's tourism industry. I hope you will support the passage of this bill.