



May 15, 2025

**Testimony of Katie Soucy on behalf of Starting Strong
In support of LD 1859: An Act to Improve Access to Child Care and Early Childhood Education
by Establishing Regional Resource Hubs**

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and members of the Health and Human Services Committee, my name is Katie Soucy and I am the director of *Starting Strong*, a coalition in Portland working to improve outcomes for young children and their families. I'm here today to express our strong support for LD 1859, which would establish regional early childhood resource hubs—an approach we know works, because we've seen it in action.

Starting Strong is proud to be one of Maine's First4ME pilot sites, and our experience leading this work in Cumberland County is directly relevant to what this bill proposes. Through First4ME, we've helped implement a regional model of care coordination, family engagement, and provider support—building a local infrastructure that bridges gaps between families, providers, and systems. It's made a real difference.

LD 1859 takes the lessons of First4ME and scales them statewide, by directing DHHS to establish regional hubs affiliated with existing nonprofit partners. These hubs would:

- Conduct regional needs assessments,
- Help families find and apply for child care,
- Connect families to local and state resources,
- Support early educators with training and shared services, and
- Collaborate with employers and school districts to respond to local demand.

This kind of coordination is not a luxury—it's a necessity. In Portland, even with a relatively high number of providers, families still face long waitlists, complex application processes, and significant cost burdens. In more rural parts of Cumberland County and across Maine, the challenge is even greater. Many areas are considered child care deserts, where the supply of care falls far short of the need.

We also know that 67% of Maine children under age six have all available parents in the workforce—yet too many of those parents are sidelined or forced into part-time work simply because they can't find care. This isn't just a family issue—it's a workforce and economic development issue.

Through our First4ME work, we've seen how impactful it is to have a trusted, regional hub where families can get support, and where providers can connect to professional development, financial assistance, and operational guidance. What LD 1859 does is formalize that model and ensure it's available in every region of the state.

By building on the First4ME framework and grounding this effort in existing community-based organizations, LD 1859 avoids duplication, strengthens local partnerships, and addresses one of the root causes of Maine's child care crisis: lack of coordinated infrastructure.

On behalf of Starting Strong and our partners across Cumberland County, I urge your support for LD 1859. It's a smart, scalable approach to improving access, building supply, and supporting both families and educators statewide.

Thank you for your leadership and your time today.

Respectfully submitted,
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Director, Starting Strong

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