



May 15, 2025

Testimony of Katie Soucy on behalf of Starting Strong

In support of LD 1736: An Act to Increase the Supply of Child Care Services Through the Use of Contracts

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Health and Human Services Committee, my name is Katie Soucy and I am the director of *Starting Strong*, a coalition of organizations in Portland working together to improve outcomes for young children and their families. I'm here today to express our strong support for LD 1736.

At Starting Strong, we've spent the past decade working to strengthen the early childhood system in our local community. Our coalition includes early childhood providers, schools, hospitals, social service agencies, public health professionals, and funders—all of whom are seeing the same thing: families can't find care, providers can't stay open, and the children who need the most support are often the ones least likely to receive it.

LD 1736 provides a critical tool to help reverse this trend. By allowing the Office of Child and Family Services to use contracts, rather than relying solely on subsidies, this bill gives the state the flexibility to proactively invest in care for high-need populations—including infants and toddlers, children with disabilities, and families in underserved and rural areas.

Right now, child care funding in Maine is almost entirely dependent on market-based subsidies, which assume supply already exists and that families can access it. But we know that's not the case. Many communities—especially rural and low-income areas—lack child care altogether. And the families most in need of consistent, high-quality care are the ones most likely to be left out.

Contracts offer a more stable and strategic approach. They provide predictable revenue for providers, making it more feasible to open or maintain slots for populations that are harder to serve—such as infants and toddlers, who require higher staff-to-child ratios and more intensive care. These contracts can help cover fixed costs and reduce the financial risk for providers who want to serve these groups but can't afford to under current models.

This bill is not just about funding—it's about making our child care system work better. Maine currently loses an estimated \$403 million each year due to child care-related disruptions to workforce participation, productivity, and business operations. LD 1736 is a smart, strategic investment in child care supply and system stability that will help mitigate those losses while better serving our children and families.

On behalf of Starting Strong, I thank you for considering this important legislation. We urge your support for LD 1736 as a meaningful step toward creating a more equitable and sustainable child care system in Maine.

Respectfully submitted,

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Director, Starting Strong

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