

Hannah Marshall
Buxton
LD 1955

My name is Hannah Marshall, and I am the Executive Director of Space to Thrive, a non-profit child care program serving families in Windham and in Raymond. I am also a new parent, home with my 10-day old. I live in Buxton, Maine. I am writing to express my strong support for LD 1736, LD 1859, and LD 1955—three essential bills that—both individually and when combined with several other bills that have been proposed recently—will address major challenges faced by the child care field.

LD 1955 would provide crucial support to the field and to families seeking care. Throughout the strong testimonies of others in the field, you have heard grim data on waitlists, workforce challenges, desperate need for more child care, and the need for ongoing financial support for educators. Every child care director understands having to make impossible budgetary decisions, and can empathize with legislators trying to determine where to allocate funds to have the most positive impact, and to do the least damage. Though this bill will require significant state investment in the field, the cost of not passing this bill would be detrimental.

My program serves more than 120 families in out of school time, and is preparing to open a facility for early childhood. Of our current 15 employees, it is very likely that at least ten of these would be forced to exit the field if we as a program cannot compensate and provide the salary equivalent. Our board of directors has discussed a worst-case-scenario situation if the wage supplement program is cut, and has determined that at minimum, we would need to increase our rates \$10 per week per child. Considering several multi-children families, this would not be sustainable for many families. Last year when the stipends were reduced, we lost two staff. In discussion with these individuals, the reduction in the financial stability was a significant factor in their departure from the field. One went on to sell Aflac insurance, and another left to bartend in Portland, as both of these would be more financially stable than working in the child care field. One of them also shared with me, “I’m just tired of being in a field where I don’t feel respected. The cuts to the stipends feel like a slap in the face.” This bill would take steps to address both the financial inequities and also start to build on the professionalization work that has begun over recent years.

Further funding for the affordability program will bring much needed relief to the hundreds of families who qualify for but are waiting for support. These families are not seeking handouts—they are eager to join the workforce and support their families.

As I mentioned, everyone who manages a child care budget can appreciate trying to do more with less. Most child cares operate within 1% profit margins—and many operate at deficits. We all understand the financial strain on the state system, and acknowledge that serious creativity will be required in order to facilitate these investments in child care.

One potential solution here feels like it could be engaging the private sector to alleviate some of the burden on the state. I would like to share my own experience with these attempts and shed light on some of the barriers to this as a solution. Perhaps the most significant barrier is the capacity for those of us in the field to seek additional funding sources. Right now, nearly every administrator I know spends a considerable amount of time in the classroom to compensate for a lack of qualified workforce. In order to partner with businesses, relationships must be built over time, and there needs to be the opportunity for someone to do community outreach and participate in these conversations. As an executive director of a non-profit program, I have focused a lot of energy in the recent years in this work, and have found it to be extremely slow and with little return on the time investment. In speaking with programs that have found success in gaining financial support from businesses, they have started with the businesses where the parents in their programs are employed. In

my program, the vast majority of our parents do not work for big companies. Our demographics include a majority of households where at least one parent is self-employed. The largest employer in our area is the school district, and though we have pursued conversations around securing spots for district employees, etc., this has not been feasible as the district can't show favoritism with one child care over another.

I have worked with the United Way and Coastal Enterprises to understand mechanisms for private sector partnerships, and have come to understand that in urban areas with many large businesses, this model can be successful. However, in rural areas, it is much, much more challenging.

Though I could go on about how this bill is desperately needed, and urgently, I believe that this committee has heard from many members of the field urging your support. I genuinely appreciate the efforts this committee has made to bring much-needed relief to the workforce behind the workforce.

Thank you for your time.