

Colleen Brown
Whiting
LD 1414

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services,

My name is Colleen Brown, and I am writing in support of LD 1414, “An Act to Support and Sustain Maine’s Child Care Workforce.”

Maine’s child care workforce is in crisis, and the reality on the ground is far more complex than simply “we need more staff.” Programs are struggling with staffing shortages, inadequate resources to support employees, and high burnout due to the increasing social-emotional and behavioral needs of young children today.

In early childhood settings, staff are managing aggressive and noncompliant behavior, significant sensory processing needs, and developmental challenges that require more training, more support, and more hands-on supervision than most programs can safely provide. Many children are also entering programs with complex needs related to autism spectrum profiles or prenatal drug exposure. These are not the only contributing factors, but they represent a large portion of what early childhood providers are being asked to handle.

At the same time, there are not enough programs available, and child care licensing has become so bureaucratic that it is extremely difficult to find locations that can meet requirements without costly renovations. Even when families can find a program, transportation is a major barrier, and start and end times often do not align with working parents’ schedules.

This crisis is especially disturbing in light of news reports of alleged fraud within parts of the child care system. Maine needs both stronger supports for legitimate providers and strong accountability to protect public funds and families.

If Maine is serious about building a stable workforce and supporting children early, then LD 1414 must result in meaningful improvements including increased staffing supports, practical program expansion strategies, and reforms that reduce unnecessary barriers while maintaining safety and quality.

Finally, Maine must consider how this impacts larger policy initiatives, including the rollout of LD 345. A sustainable child care system is a foundational building block for long-term success in education and special education services. Without a strong early childhood infrastructure, the State will continue to face breakdowns later in the system that are more expensive and harder to fix.

Thank you for considering my testimony and for your work on LD 1414.

Respectfully submitted,
Colleen Brown
Whiting, Maine