



Senator Curry, Representative Roberts , and honorable members of the committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement, and Business: my name is Adam Zuckerman and I am the lobbyist for the Maine People's Alliance. Our 32,000 members stretch from Kittery to Fort Kent. We are committed to creating a state of Maine where everyone has what they need, everyone contributes what they can, and no one is left behind.

I am here today to testify in favor of LD 1652, Speaker Fecteau's Act To Build a Child Care System by Recruiting and Retaining Maine's Early Childhood Workforce.

I'm sure that many of you, like so many parents across our state, have felt overwhelmed more than once in the past year.

When schools were closed you had to juggle legislative hearings, your day jobs, helping kids attend Zoom classes, cleaning, cooking, running errands, and yard work without forgetting to eat, sleep, or breathe.

Raise your hand if at any point you felt overwhelmed in the last year. Okay, good. Raise your other hand if you felt overwhelmed at more than one point in the last year. Heck, I raised my hand and I don't even have children.

Think of a typical day where you juggle being a parent, a spouse, a legislator, and an employee or small business owner. Now think of a number in your head of how much you think someone should make to take care of children.

I can bet that the number in your head is higher than what child care workers actually make. The median wage for early educators working in Maine child care programs is \$12.89 per hour, which is \$26,811 annually. That's just not enough to get by. It's no wonder we can't recruit enough child care workers! The poverty rate for early educators in Maine is 16.5 percent, much higher than Maine workers in general (9.4 percent) and 8.3 times as high as K-8 teachers (2 percent). In fact, over half of child care educators need to access public benefits. That's just not right.

Child care educators do one of the hardest and most important jobs in our entire state. If we want to attract more child care educators or even keep the ones we have now, we need to invest in our child care workforce.

The economic impact of that investment would be far reaching. When early educators make livable wages, we reduce the number of families needing public

assistance, we reduce staffing shortages in our child care sector, and we support the educators that are supporting the healthy development of our youngest learners.

It may be the most important investment our state can make. Thank you. I'm glad to answer any questions you may have.