

**TESTIMONY BY TESTIMONY BY BEN GILMAN
LEGAL COUNSEL, MAINE STATE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
AND MEMBER, READYNATION
BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON
HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
IN SUPPORT OF LD 1712 AN ACT TO SUPPORT CHILDREN'S HEALTHY
DEVELOPMENT AND SCHOOL SUCCESS
THURSDAY, MAY 20, 202, 3 P.M.**

Chairs Claxon and Meyer, distinguished members of the Health and Human Services Committee, I am Ben Gilman, Legal Counsel Senior at the Maine State Chamber of Commerce and a member of the business organization ReadyNation. The Maine State Chamber of Commerce is also proud to be a co-leader of the MaineSpark Coalition that is dedicated to achieving the state's education attainment goal that 60 percent of Maine adults have a credential of value by 2025.

I offer the Chamber's continued support for high-quality early learning programs and the importance of supporting proposals like LD1712 as a tool to build and strengthen Maine's future workforce.

One of the pandemic's many lessons is that accessible, affordable, high-quality child care is critically important - especially to Maine's business community. The widespread shutdowns last spring halted or greatly limited the work of businesses all across our state. But even when businesses reopened, many employees could not return to work or return full time. With their children's child care centers and schools closed or with limited hours of operation, many parents had to stay home and care for their kids.

If workers can't work because they lack child care, that's a barrier to each business' ability to operate.

I can also share with this Committee that as a father of four kids ages 6 to 16, I have lived, and continue to live, the experiences of working from home while all four kids are trying to learn remotely; and I know the struggles of finding accessible and affordable child care.

The Maine State Chamber of Commerce has a vested interest in helping to support Maine's child care sector and we believe this bill is a priority, and a good start to helping build and sustain workers in this critical employment sector. The Maine State Chamber of Commerce is fully at this table. I was a member of DECD's working group that drafted Maine's 10-year economic strategy and plan, which, for the first time, includes "building world class child care." Maine State Chamber of Commerce CEO Dana Connors and some of our board members served on

Governor Mill's Economic Recovery Committee, which made supporting child care one of its top priorities.

Maine business leaders believe strongly that education is the single most important investment that can be made to ensure successful participation in the new, knowledge-based economy, earnings growth and improved health status. Post-secondary education and training are critical building block to ensure success in the work force. High-quality early education and K-12 are imperative building blocks to ensure post-secondary success. Moving each and every Mainer along the educational continuum to their highest educational potential is imperative. We have all seen the charts and know that there is a huge different in lifetime earnings between a college graduate and someone who drops out of high school: \$1.5 million per drop out. These staggering earning losses translate into less spending power, fewer contributions to the tax base, and less productivity.

Education is a critical investment in Maine people and in our economy and should be treated as such, through a coordinated approach starting with our youngest children. High quality early learning, like that proposed here in LD 1712, helps Maine's youngest learners build the social, emotional and cognitive foundations they need to arrive at Kindergarten ready to succeed. This proposal is an important first step and merits state investments. A 2013 research report by ReadyNation shows that children who participate in high-quality early learning programs have greater success and:

- Are 44% more likely to graduate from high school;
- Are 74% more likely to hold a skilled job; and
- Make 26% more in earnings as adults.

These numbers translate into an unbeatable long-term rate of return – up to \$13 for every \$1 invested.

As stated in our Maine State Chamber of Commerce/Maine Development Foundation joint *Making Maine Work* report “Investment in Young Children = Real Economic Development,” for Maine people to truly reach their potential, it all starts at birth. Waiting to invest in Maine's most precious assets, our children, until they enter our K-12 system is, for many, too late. To attain our vision of a high quality of life for all Maine people we must ensure that each and every Maine child has access to high quality care and education from birth. Investment in early education IS real economic development. It's not just a social and moral imperative, it is an economic imperative.

The Maine State Chamber of Commerce also hears from businesses all across the state that the lack of high-quality child care is a barrier to work for too many people. We know that 73% of all Maine children under age 6 have all parents in the workforce. We know that working parents want their children enrolled in high-quality early learning programs and that full day programs, especially those that include wrap around care before- and after-school, are what is most needed

for working parents' schedules. Such continuity of care provides young students with the ability to create attachments to the same caregiver – which is one component of quality.

That's the kind of programming embraced by LD1712, which seeks to transform community service coordination by using all of the assets of a local community and breaking down the silos between services to reduce fragmentation in services to children and families. LD 1712 is designed as a community-based approach, it is comprehensive, multi-generational, and also supports the much-needed training and technical assistance to those working in the child care field.

Without question child care is a key piece of Maine's future workforce development and the Chamber is pleased to see that the Administration has recognized that fact and has made increasing access to child care part of Maine's new 10-year economic plan. LD 1760 is the first step in achieving this goal.

I urge the Committee to unanimously support LD1712.

Thank you.