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***Testimony of Rep. Valli Geiger introducing
LD 684, An Act to Implement Pilot Programs with Publicly Funded Day Care and Early
Childhood Education
Before the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee***

Good morning Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and honorable members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee. My name is Valli Geiger and I represent District 42 which includes Rockland, most of Owls Head and the islands of North Haven, Matinicus, Crie Haven and the Muscle Ridge. I am here to introduce LD 684, “An Act to Implement Pilot Programs with Publicly Funded Day Care and Early Childhood Education.”

We are all aware by now that there has been a market failure in the daycare and early childhood education industry. Accessible, affordable and quality daycare is unavailable to an increasing number of Maine parents. Early childhood education and care is too expensive for most families. At the same time, child care workers and those with early childhood development degrees are poorly paid and frequently leave the field. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these issues.

Two hundred child care providers around the state closed permanently during the pandemic. There has been a 19% decline in child care workers.¹ Child care was prohibitively expensive for many families even before the pandemic, and one-in-five Mainers lived in a “child care desert” – an area in which the number of young children exceeds the number of child care slots by more than three times. According to the Census Bureau’s Household Pulse survey, last May, thousands of Maine parents were either out of work or working reduced hours because their child’s daycare or school was closed due to COVID-19.²

This bill seeks to address these problems by piloting a model for a publicly-funded early childhood daycare in two school districts in Maine.

Early childhood education is a necessary step in setting our children up for success. Providing at-risk children with high-quality early learning opportunities can help reduce the human and fiscal costs of crime in the future, by setting children up for success in school and beyond.

¹ <https://www.strongnation.org/articles/1865-child-care-providers-the-workforce-behind-the-workforce-in-maine>

² <https://www.mecep.org/blog/maines-worker-shortage-has-deep-roots/>

Experts have found a connection between Adverse Childhood Events (ACEs) and the staggering costs to society when those events occur. Examples of ACEs include emotional, physical and sexual abuse, emotional and physical neglect, domestic violence, mental illness in the home, substance abuse, among other traumatizing events. Childhood trauma compromises neurological development and increases risk for immediate and long term adverse health outcomes.

According to a CDC and Kaiser Permanente study, the impact of ACEs starts during childhood and continue into adulthood. Kids with high ACE scores are more likely to experience anxiety and depression, developmental delays, including negative cognitive and socioemotional health issues, academic challenges, behavioral health issues and specialized health needs. ACEs also increase the likelihood of high school non-completion, not having a college degree, being unemployed as an adult, living below the poverty line and experiencing homelessness.³

The association between high ACEs and negative health outcomes are consistently seen for all populations and socio-economic levels. More than half the general population experiences at least one ACE, over 25% experience two or more ACEs and one in eight people experience four or more ACEs. But children living in poverty, including those experiencing homelessness, are more likely to carry high ACE scores, increasing their risk of developmental challenges and poor health and functioning.⁴

The CDC has compiled a series of resources aimed at preventing ACEs from happening or reoccurring. Six key approaches the CDC recommends include: strengthening economic supports to families; promoting social norms that protect against violence and adversity; ensuring a strong start for children; teaching skills like social-emotional learning, identifying safe dating and healthy relationships and parenting skills; connecting youth to caring adults and activities; and intervening to lessen immediate and long-term harms.⁵

The pilot program proposed in this bill is modeled after a publicly-funded early education and daycare program called “Educare” that was first introduced in Chicago schools in 2000 and is now utilized with great success across the nation.⁶ This model incorporates all six strategies recommended by the CDC. LD 684 proposes to implement this Educare model in two service center communities in Maine, one of which will be RSU 13. The other community is still to be determined.

The Educare model draws upon extensive data, it embeds professional development in the program and involves high-quality teaching and intensive family engagement. It would strengthen economic supports to families, provide year round, consistent early education and care for children - infant to five years old - and allow adults to work. The model promotes strong norms that protect against violence and adversity for children.

Educare focuses on intensive family engagement and is trauma informed. This bill ensures a strong start for children providing an enriched, nurturing environment with substantial family

³ <https://nhhc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/aces-fact-sheet.pdf>

⁴ <https://nhhc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/aces-fact-sheet.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/aces/prevention.html>

⁶ <https://www.educareschools.org/about/educare-history/>

engagement by teaching parental skills, connecting youth to caring staff and offering enriched activities. An Educare model allows for daily eyes on the child and family and the opportunity to intervene to lessen immediate and long term harms.

This bill proposes to study how to implement the Educare model across Maine school districts to test how to scale up to the kind of state-wide, publicly funded child care system that has proven effective in bringing struggling children to a place of stability and readiness to learn that is equal to their middle class peers. Several years of rigorous evaluation show that when children leave Educare for elementary school, the majority are academically, socially and emotionally prepared for kindergarten.⁷

Maine is suffering from an acute and ongoing labor shortage. We also have a large cohort of children who suffered Adverse Childhood Events in early childhood, impacting their physical and emotional health and resulting in permanent impacts on their ability to learn, thrive in the educational setting and go on to be a successful part of the Maine workforce. This bill presents an opportunity to address these multifaceted issues by exploring a promising model that has the potential to confer meaningful benefits to Maine families, our economy and the future of our state.

Thank you and I am happy to take questions.

⁷ <https://educareflint.org/our-approach/educare-%20model/>

LD 684 An Act to Implement Pilot Programs with Publicly Funded Day Care and Early Childhood Education (Rep. Geiger) (CONCEPT DRAFT)

Rep. Geiger Proposed Amendment for 4/13/23 Public Hearing

Strike the bill and replace it with a resolve as follows:

Resolve, Directing the Department of Education to Establish A Pilot Project for Publicly Funded Day Care and Early Childhood Education

Sec. 1. Pilot project for publicly funded day care and early childhood education.

Resolved: That the Department of Education shall establish a 3-year pilot project to implement 2 publicly funded day care programs for children from birth to 5. Each day care program in the pilot project must:

1. Be located in a service center community, one of which must be through Regional School Unit 13 in Rockland;
2. Be designed based on the Educare model and its four core features of data utilization, embedded professional development, high-quality teaching and intensive family engagement;
3. Address strategies to strengthen economic supports to families, promote social norms that protect against violence and adversity, ensure a strong start for children, teach necessary skills, connect youth to caring adults and activities and to lessen immediate and long-term harms;
4. Allow for the use of professionally trained staff earning public school wages; and
5. Assist children from low-income backgrounds or with a history of trauma to achieve readiness by kindergarten.

Sec. 2. Study of implementation. Resolved: That the Department of Education shall study the implementation of the pilot project under section 1 and work with the communities selected for the pilot project to identify:

1. The critical components of the Educare model that are necessary to the model's success and the resources necessary to achieve those critical components;
2. How the Educare model can address the impacts of adverse childhood experiences on young learners; and
3. Strategies for implementing the Educare model in other communities.

Sec. 3. Report. Resolved: That by January 1, 2024 and in each subsequent year of the pilot project, the Department of Education shall submit a report to the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over education matters. Each report must include an update on the status of the pilot project, identification of successes or barriers to success in implementing the pilot project, and any findings, recommendations or suggested legislation, including but not limited to whether the pilot project should be expanded or made permanent. The joint standing committee having jurisdiction over education matters may report out a bill to the session of the Legislature during which the report is received relating to the subject matter of the report.

SUMMARY

This proposed amendment replaces the concept draft, and directs the Department of Education to establish a 3-year pilot project to implement 2 publicly funded day care programs for children from birth to 5 based on the Educare model. Each program must be established in a service center community, one of which must be through RSU 13 in Rockland, and must be designed allow for the use of professionally trained staff earning public school wages and assist children from low-income backgrounds or with a history of trauma to achieve readiness by kindergarten. The Department of Education is directed to study the implementation of the pilot project and report back to the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over education matters in each year of the pilot project.