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Maine Association for the
Education of Young Children

Testimony of Heather Marden
On behalf of the Maine Association for the Education of Young Children

In support of LD 1544: An Act to Improve Economic Security for Maine Children by Establishing
the Maine Dependent Tax Credit

5/4/023

Senator Grohoski, Representative Perry and distinguished members of the Committee on Taxation, my name is Heather Marden, Co-Executive Director of the Maine Association for the Education of Young Children (MaineAEYC).

MaineAEYC promotes high-quality early learning for each and every child, birth through age 8, by connecting practice, policy, and research. We advance a diverse, dynamic early childhood profession and support all who care for, educate, and work on behalf of young children.

Poverty is often misunderstood and mischaracterized as simply lacking resources. However, for children of poverty, the consequences of circumstances can be lifelong. It can have negative effects on the developing child; even altering the fundamental architecture of the brain. This is a contributing factor for poverty being generational.

From birth to age 5, a child's brain develops more rapidly than at any other time in life. And while genetics plays a significant role, scientific research has made clear that the quality of a child's experiences in the first few years of life – positive or negative – helps shape how their brain develops. And that these experiences have lasting impact on their health and ability to learn and succeed in school and in life.

“Children growing up in poverty, when compared with their economically more secure peers, fall behind early. Starting in infancy, gaps are evident in key aspects of learning, knowledge, and social-emotional development. When left unaddressed, these early gaps become progressively wider. Early optimal development tends to open doors to further optimal development, while impoverished development tends to close those doors. So, poor children lag behind their peers at entry to kindergarten, in reading ability at the end of third grade, in the important self-monitoring skills often called “executive functioning,” and in school attendance in eighth grade. Poor children are more likely to drop out of school, or fail to obtain post-secondary education.”

What has been widely recognized is that you cannot just resource a child to solve the negative effects that poverty can have on development. We must look at two generational approaches to both support the family and the child. To support economic stability such as providing a refundable child tax credit, can reduce the stress a family has about putting food on the table, or paying for child care, or getting their car fixed so they can make it to work. Income support enhances children's lifetime social and economic outcomes by allowing families to meet basic needs and by increasing families' income stability.

To care for Maine's children and strengthen the future outcomes has to come at the willingness to support their families. Please support LD 1544.