

Senator Grohoski, Representative Perry, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Taxation: my name is Rebekah Sousa, I am a resident of Jefferson, ME and I am here today to testify in favor of LD 1544.

Knowing that this testimony is a matter of public record, knowing that going forward, a Google search will show more than what I've cultivated on social media and in my professional life is really hard, but this is my truth.

Being a mom is the most important thing I will do with my life. As a Mainer—my family roots in the midcoast spread back at least to the early 1700s—I'm tough. I'm a survivor. I'm a planner. I strive to be self-sufficient and hard-working. And I love that my neighbors are the same! As an example, my family "invested" a portion of our federal tax credit on fruit trees and stocking the pond with fish "just in case."

And yet despite being a veteran, holding a master's degree, and having a ton of privilege and advantages, I find it ridiculously hard to provide for AND raise my children. If only a few of us in a community were struggling, we could pin it on personal failings, but these are some of the systemic problems we're up against:

- Lack of affordable, safe housing
- Inflation
- Rising energy costs
- Childcare being unavailable, prohibitively expensive, or harmfully low quality
- Mental health services being unavailable while at the same time, so many of us are holding on by our fingernails.

My ugly truth is that I want to give my kids better than I am right now, and not for lack of trying. Because this is a vulnerable season. Because even if I was able to get childcare (I've been waitlisted for over a year), I'm still at the mercy of their health and school schedule. I'm still taking jobs with "mom hours" and praying for sympathetic supervisors.

I don't think that \$350 a year is going to solve all of these problems, but every little bit helps. I do think it is essential to include ALL children, especially in low income families like mine.

I love how Maine leads the way for the rest of the country in many policies. I think LD 1544 could be a vote for supporting families—especially through the hard times—and I hope we can help blaze this trail across the nation and into Washington D.C.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to take questions or be available at another time for deeper discussion.