

LD 1799 An Act to Expand Maine's High-quality Early Learning and Care for Children by Increasing Public Preschool Opportunities in Communities



Pre-K bill LD 1799 - Mixed Delivery System

Testimony of LD 1799

In support of

LD 1799 An Act to Expand Maine's High-quality Early Learning and Care for Children by Increasing Public Preschool Opportunities in Communities

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and distinguished members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, my name is Sessa Salas. I am the Director of a Peopleplace Cooperative Preschool, and I live in Camden. I'm testifying in support of LD 1799 An Act to Expand Maine's High-quality Early Learning and Care for Children by Increasing Public Preschool Opportunities in Communities.

I'd like to start by thanking you. We are all here today because there are efforts being made to address the issues in our childcare system and improve the lives of Maine children, families, and those providers who are in service to those families and children.

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I am here today because those in the industry of childcare and in the field of Early Childhood Education need your help. We are in crisis. The system is broken and it needs to be fixed - for everyone's sake. Our economy depends on it - literally. We would not have an economy if we did not have childcare. Women would not be in the workforce without it. Whether you look at it as an industry or a field of study, those doing this work are providing an essential service. 85% of the caregivers in Maine are women. 100% of the 12 people on my staff are women.

Peopleplace is a childcare center licensed for 47 children ages 18 months to 5 years old. We have been NAEYC accredited since 1987 (one of the first in the State of Maine). We also maintain a Star 5 on the Rising Stars for ME quality rating system. Because of our high quality and standards,

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we are required to hire and maintain high quality teachers. This means teachers are expected to pursue higher ed degrees, do between 30 and 40 hours of professional development or continuing education and increase their levels on the career lattice through the Maine Roads to Quality Professional Development Network.

The expectations are high, but the reward is not commensurate with those expectations. Not only do they not get paid for the time it takes to do that extra work, they often have to pay for that training and education. The demands are high and yet, they are getting paid the same as what someone working at a fast food restaurant makes. And with no health insurance. This is NOT okay. I would say it is downright unconscionable. I have to admit, I often feel embarrassed and ashamed.

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At my high-quality program I simply cannot pay teachers enough. If I want to pay teachers more, I have to raise tuition. Tuition that is already too expensive. Payroll is our biggest expense, by far, as it should be, at 70% of our budget. For us as a school, we have to make the difficult choice each year about whether to burden families more by raising tuition or increasing wages for teachers to pay them a liveable wage. Starting wage at my preschool is \$17/hr - which is the industry standard - or higher. It is NOT enough. Now we are faced with increasing our current teacher's wages in order to account for inflation because our starting wage was at \$15/hr a year ago. That means everyone's wages are going up. That means tuition needs to go up.

There is a disconnect between MRTQ, Dept of Education, DHHS, CDS, CCSP and it needs to be better. I had a lead teacher

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who had been working at my school for over 10 years. She was the highest paid teacher at around \$35,000 annual salary. The local public school in my district opened a public pre-k two years ago (that they modeled after our program). That teacher was hired by them and is now making \$80,000 a year. That salary, plus an Ed Tech's salary at another \$40,000 a year (with benefits) totals \$120,000 for 16 preschool children to attend this public Pre-K program. Not only that, the local public school has decided to fill those spots with 20% low-income and 80% high and middle income earners. This is not an equitable system and we need to do better.

That is compared to approximately \$48,000 we pay our teachers to serve the same number of children for the same amount of time.

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There are a total of about 65 4yr olds in our district being served. The public school only serves 16 of those children - and at a very high cost. The others are being served by other private nonprofit childcare or preschools in our area.

When I approached the local school district to partner and enter into a Memorandum of Understanding under the public pre-k Chapter 124 rules, they had no interest. There is no incentive for them to partner with us. They are not meeting the demand for childcare in our district. We are doing the work and we need support in order to provide this essential service to the families in our community.

The childcare delivery system in the State of Maine needs to be examined more closely and revamped to be more equitable for everyone.

Thank you for your time and consideration!

Do not apologize for this rough draft. I didn't realize I had to make copies for everyone!