

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF LD 1726 –  
Jeremy Fischer, Maine Early Learning Investment Group  
May 10, 2023, 10 a.m. Health and Human Service Committee**

Good morning Chairpersons Baldacci and Meyer, and members of the Health and Human Services Committee

My name is Jeremy Fischer. I'm a former member of the House, where I represented Presque Isle for three terms. During my time in the Legislature, I served on the Education Committee and chaired the Appropriations Committee, where I worked to expand access to Head Start. Since leaving the Legislature, I've been very involved in the issue of early care and education. I currently serve on (1) the Governor's Children's Cabinet's Early Childhood Advisory Counsel, (2) EducateMaine's Early Learning Advisory Committee, (3) Educare Central Maine's board of directors, and (4) my local school board, where I helped start a public pre-K program last year. I'm also the father of three sons, ages 10, 8, and 4.

I'm here today, however, to testify on as a board member of the Maine Early Learning Investment Group. We're a group of business leaders from all corners of the state who understand the economic impact of the comprehensive and high quality early care and education services.

Overwhelming, the evidence shows that quality early care prepares kids to succeed in school and in their lives. There are stacks of research papers that validate the important role that it plays in our education system. Getting the first 5 years of life off to an educationally sound start is a major predictor of the contribution each and every one of our youngest Maine citizens will make when they become adults.

From the business community's perspective, child care is one of the most fundamental components of our *business infrastructure*. Businesses can't expand without workforce, and parents can't be part of the workforce unless their children are cared for. In Maine, 69% of children under the age of 6 have all available parents in the workforce. This means that there are more 50,000 children under 6 in Maine who need child care.

Addressing this problem requires a coordinated and sustained approach to support children, families, and the early educators. That's exactly what LD 1726 does. It's a comprehensive bill that focuses on the three most important factors for expanding access to quality early care and education in every corner of our state – access, affordability and quality. It accomplishes this goal by increasing wages for child care workers, expanding eligibility for child care subsidies, and improving the quality of care.

For these reasons, the Maine Early Learning Investment Group urges you to support LD 1726. I am happy to answer any questions that you may have.