

Testimony of Camelia Babson-Haley

In support of

LD 1726 An Act to Build Maine's Economy by Supporting Child Care and Working Families

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Health and Human Services Committee, my name is Camelia Babson-Haley and I am the Director of Youth and Family Outreach in Portland. I'm testifying in support of LD 1726 An Act to Build Maine's Economy by Supporting Child Care and Working Families.

In my 34 years in the field I have never experienced the instability that is compromising the foundation of our industry, at this current time. Our workforce is disappearing. We are a staff of 18, and since June 2020, 16 employees have resigned, throwing us into a constant and chaotic hiring loop. 75% of those that gave us their notice cited inadequate wages as the reason. The early education sector and the families that we serve have lost highly skilled educators because they cannot afford to stay. And the turnover has not ceased even with the wage supplements that are currently in place. While we are so very grateful, it is not enough. And despite redirecting every financial resource available at YFO to direct care staff wages, many of our staff work second jobs and are still struggling. The additional wage supports proposed in LD 1726 are desperately needed. It is time we recognize that the people caring for our youngest children are carrying out the most significant work in our world. They are developing young brains, laying the foundation on which everything else will be built for this little human. And as you know, they are the workforce behind the workforce.

I would also like to talk about the elements in the bill specific to the childcare subsidy. YFO intentionally enrolls 60% of our children from low-income households. Therefore, stability in the subsidies we receive for these children is critical. It is imperative to our business model that the subsidy program continue to pay providers based on enrollment and not attendance.

Furthermore, raising subsidy eligibility and reducing barriers to applying are key to ensuring Maine families can obtain and maintain employment. Time and again I have heard from families that were denied eligibility because they were over the household income by less than \$1500 per year. Given the unprecedented inflation in the last year, families cannot keep up. It is heartbreaking to hear their stories.

I implore you to support LD 1726. Together we can stabilize and right this ship.

Thank you for hearing me today.