



Testimony of Jennifer Vachon

In support of

LD 1726 An Act to Build Maine's Economy by Supporting Child Care for Working Families sponsored by Senate President Troy Jackson

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Health and Human Services Committee, my name is Jennifer Vachon I am the owner of Parkside Children's Learning Center in Bangor We serve children 6 weeks-Pre-K I'm testifying in support of LD 1726 An Act to Build Maine's Economy by Supporting Child Care and Working Families

Currently, we have 91 children in our program and we have 24 full time and part-time employees Our program has suffered terribly over the past 5 years (since I have owned this program) due to the competition of trying to provide professional wages and benefits We have especially felt the pressure from the start of the pandemic

On March 13, 2020 we had 37 employees in our program with 133 children enrolled between the ages of 6 weeks-5 years Now due to the staffing shortages, our program was forced to drop our enrollment to 91 children with 24 employees That is 42 children who are not getting child care services due to lack of teachers One might think that this would be easier due to the lower payroll, but I need to clarify that it is the complete opposite due to the lower enrollment our revenue has dropped immensely and because of the pressures of keeping our staff our payroll continues to remain about the same as it was

We have raised our wages, but we still cannot compete with businesses in our area Currently, the bank around the block is hiring tellers at \$18/hr And although the \$200 a month stipend is helpful, it brought our Assistant Teacher's wage from \$16 40 to about \$17 40

Over the past year I have spent \$6,882, that is \$573 50 a month for ads! I had to re-run an advertisement for 4 months until I found a caregiver! 4 months to find a person who was necessary to keep our children safe When we don't have the appropriate number of caregivers to meet our ratios, it's

not the same as when there is a vacant position in an office I fear that if a change doesn't happen soon our program will be forced to change our enrollment again due to losing more team members

Our payroll is currently 82% of our budget I urge you to look at this bill with the sincerity and the seriousness that caregivers in our state deserve Our great child care educators are in a place where they need to decide how they are going to pay their bills while working in a job they love OR leave to go to another field that provides them the opportunity to pay their bills Our program cannot pay our employees any more than we do, but without your support I fear we are going to lose our amazing caregivers

We cannot afford to lose any more or we will be forced to close Please support LD 1726

Thank you