



# Maine Head Start Directors Association

Mary Lynn Hersey, Vice Chair  
Waldo, CAP

9 Field Street PO Box 130, Belfast, ME 04915  
207-338-6809, ext 2001

## Testimony of Mary Lynn Hersey

### 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 Mary Lynn Hersey and I am a member of the Maine Head Start Director's Association and speaking as a representative on behalf of the Head Start programs within the State. I am testifying in support of LD 1726 An Act to Build Maine's Economy to Supporting Child Care and Working Families.

I have been working in Early Care and Education for over 30 years and never have I seen such a dire need to address the issues of workforce, access, and affordability as I do now within our early care and education system.

Head Start programs across the state have two challenges they are working to address as we transition through the global pandemic: reaching families and work force

Senate President Troy Jackson's Bill addresses the challenges families face every day to decide whether they can afford to work, do they have quality, accessible programming for their young child AND are there consistent, qualified, reliable early educators to care for the nearly 76,000 children under age 6 in Maine.

As you are familiar with Head Start programming; we are serving the most vulnerable families and children within our communities. Allowing for center based educational settings and a whole family approach to lift families to meet goals of continued education, economic stability, and self-sufficiency. Many Head Start programs, offer extended days, providing childcare, with families accessing childcare subsidies.

With the average starting wage for working families being \$15 hour, a single mom with a young child is currently over-income for Head Start and limited access to current subsidy vouchers. This increase in income does not move a family out of poverty and does not in any way increase their ability to gain ground socially or economically because of the increase in living expenses due to inflation. Head Start programs across the state are seeing an increase in children and families who are would be transitioning from Early Head Start programs to Head Start programs, becoming ineligible for services as they are over the 100% Federal Poverty threshold.

Senate President Jackson's bill increases state funding for Head Start programs by supporting funds to serve families with children up to 185% of the Federal Poverty Level

With the funding to reach families within 185% of the Federal Poverty Level, we can provide the high-quality programming and reach these families who may be struggling with difficult and challenging situations such as recovery, domestic violence, homelessness, or unstable housing

Additionally, the bill will address the expansion of childcare subsidy eligibility from 85% state median income to 125%. Families eligible for Early and Head Start services are also in need of extended day child care programming, which several Head Start programs offer across the state. Keep in mind the average cost of center-based child care in

Maine is \$11,960 for an infant; which is more than in-state public college tuition of \$11,031.

With the passing of Senate President Jackson's bill child care and Head Start will be more accessible.

In addition to reaching and serving vulnerable families; Early Childhood programs providing Early Head Start, Head Start and child care services are grappling with work force issues. During the pandemic, many child care programs were forced to close. As we continue to transition through the pandemic, programs are met with 19% decline in child care workers. Head Start programs struggle to open classrooms due to the inability to appropriately staff classrooms. It is estimated that 1100 child care educators will need to be hired to fill current program capacity in a 2023 survey conducted by the Maine Association for the Education of Young Children.

In addition to being in the Early Care workforce for over 30 years, I am a proud mother of a daughter who chose her career six years ago in Early Child Education after completing her Bachelor's Degree in Early Childhood. She has been a Head Start teacher in Southern Maine and whole heartedly loved serving the families within that community. As she and her partner bought their first house and began making plans to begin a family, the reality sunk in, she has chosen to make a career change, going back to school for Speech Pathology. She painfully said goodbye to her children, families and early care and educational colleagues.

The average salary for early care providers is approximately \$32,000, while a kindergarten teacher begins at \$52,000.

My daughter, who has an education to support the early learning of children under the age of five; could not afford to follow her passion and serve the new Mainers and their families, as she too was struggling to make ends meet.

With Senate President Troy Jackson's bill, current wage supplements for early care staff will double monthly. Child care educators can join the profession and stay, as wage supplements support growth and compensation.

On behalf of the Head Start Directors Association, I ask you support LD 1726; an act to build Maine's Economy by Supporting Child Care and Working Families

We are recommending a proposed amendment to LD 1726 in Section 13 Head Start eligibility rules, The Department of Health and Human Services shall (striking ) ~~amend its rules in Head Start Program, Chapter 5 to increase eligibility for enrollment in Head Start to 185% of the federal poverty level~~ and to read- contract with Maine's federal Head Start grantees to permit state funds to be used to support eligible children at up to 185% of the federal poverty level.

Thank you for your time.

1 Proposed Amendment to LD 1726

**Sec. 13. Head Start eligibility rules.** The Department of Health and Human Services shall ~~amend its rules in Head Start Program, Chapter 5 to increase eligibility for enrollment in Head Start to 185% of the federal poverty level~~ contract with Maine's federal Head Start grantees to permit state funds to be used to support some eligible children at up to 185% of the federal poverty level