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Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services: my name is Abdikhadar Shire, I live in Lewiston, and I am here today to testify in favor of LD 1726.

Almost three years ago I started a nonprofit organization, AK Health and Social Services, to promote workforce development and health equity in my community. Having access to adequate child care options is crucial to both.

I see over and over again how people who **want** to be in the workforce have to make hard choices they shouldn't have to make Many families are splitting day and night shifts to solve their child care challenges. They just don't have the flexibility they need People, especially mothers, end up turning down jobs and missing opportunities because they can't take the shifts available

Many of these are families who qualify for subsidy, but can't find openings. We know there are facilities in our community that closed down during COVID and never reopened. LD 1726 would help the people who operate or want to open child care facilities. We should support people who have initiative and want to provide this crucial need We can't keep saying we need more facilities while not supporting the people who want to start them.

I spoke of my professional interest, but child care is also an issue that hits close to home for me My wife used to work two jobs Now that we have children, our limited child care options have made it impossible for both of us to participate fully in the workforce Because it's so hard for me to step back from my organization, her dreams have been deferred for a while We're expecting another baby in just a few weeks, and until we solve the child care conundrum it's going to be difficult for her to work or pursue further education

LD 1726 is an important step for families, for the economy, and for our communities. I ask you to support its passage.

Thank you for your time. I am happy to answer any questions.