

EDUCATE MAINE



The Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
Testimony from Jason Judd, Executive Director, Educate Maine, and ReadyNation
Member

In Support Of

L D 1726 “An Act to Build Maine’s Economy by Supporting Child Care for Working Families”

Wednesday, May 10, 2023

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, distinguished members of the Health and Human Services Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today I am Jason Judd, Executive Director of Educate Maine, a business-led education advocacy organization I am here in strong support of L D 1726

Educate Maine’s mission is to ensure that Maine people are prepared to succeed in education and career and that all Maine people reach their highest educational potential Investing in accessible, affordable early child education is critical if we are to give every Maine child a strong start in life LD 1726 proposes meaningful investments in the early education system in Maine

Educate Maine is a founding partner of the MaineSpark coalition, which is working to support 60% of Maine people to achieve a degree or credential of value by 2025 The coalition has designated work groups and policy goals around Strong Foundations, focusing on the population birth to age 6, because we recognize the importance of investing early for long-term academic, career, and life success Every dollar invested in early education pays dividends down the road studies show that the return on investment in early education programs produces somewhere between seven and eleven dollars for every dollar invested due to higher academic achievement, improved health, better economic outcomes, and reduced crime ¹

As a business-led organization, we hear from our employer partners regularly about the importance of early education from a business standpoint now and into the future Without adequate child care, parents cannot participate in the workforce Employers across Maine in all industries are struggling to attract and retain employees because the child care situation is tenuous There simply are not enough child care slots to meet the immense need For example

- More than half (61%) of Portland Regional Chamber of Commerce businesses reported that their employees are having trouble finding child care,

¹ <https://heckmanequation.org/resource/early-childhood-development-roi/>

- 75% of businesses cite child care as the reason for unplanned absences, and
- Nearly half of businesses report that child care challenges as the reason that employees cannot return to work or return full-time

Lack of child care has become a drain on our economy and could produce up to \$403 million more in lost earnings, productivity, and revenue for the state if parents had reliable, affordable care for their young children ² *A vote for this bill is not only a vote of support for Maine's children and families, it is a meaningful investment in Maine's businesses and economic prosperity*

Educate Maine strongly supports the provisions laid out in this bill. We support expanding the eligibility for child care subsidy, especially given how cost-prohibitive child care can be for working families and providers. We encourage its emphasis on better data collection and analysis, cost modeling, workforce stipends, and moving toward a more comprehensive system of care that better provides for Maine's working families and, by extension, its businesses. The Education and Cultural Affairs Committee unanimously supported an increase to the minimum salary of Maine PK-12 teachers to \$50,000 in their committee just two weeks ago, and I encourage all of you to recognize that our early childhood educators deserve higher wages too. All Maine educators deserve to be compensated appropriately regardless of what grade level they teach. This bill helps address this issue. I urge you to vote yes for LD 1726. Thank you for your time.

² <https://www.strongnation.org/articles/2038-122-billion-the-growing-annual-cost-of-the-infant-toddler-child-care-crisis>