

LD 1726

**Testimony written by Jennifer Michaud**

(Owner/Director/Educator Kids Kove Childcare & Learning Center)

Maine's childcare crisis needs attention now. From Kittery to Caribou our state's early childhood education programs are struggling

My name is Jennifer Michaud and I am a childcare business owner in the state of Maine. I serve as a board member of MaineAEYC (Association of Young Children), I am an active participant in my hometown communities Heart and Soul initiative and downtown revitalization plan. I am also a member of Friends of Downtown Sanford (subsidiary of Strategies for a Stronger Sanford)

My hope today is to share a perspective as a business owner as well as represent my team of amazingly dedicated early childhood educators

As business owner of Kids Kove Childcare and Learning Center in Sanford and Springvale, I take great pride in my personal journey I have paved in the ECE field in our State over the last 15 years. To date, I have provided childcare and early learning experiences for approximately 500 children in and around the Sanford and Springvale community

In 2007 I started my career in early childhood education as an in-home early childhood educator. I started by providing care for 6 children. In 2018, an opportunity was presented to lease a commercial space in the heart of downtown Sanford. Knowing I had over 20 families on the waitlist to get into my home childcare program, I felt compelled to seize the business opportunity. On October 12, 2018 I closed my in-home family childcare program of 12 children. Just two days later my husband and I opened a childcare center in the heart of the Sanford downtown area. Four short months later word got around town and I asked for an increase in childcare capacity to meet more of the childcare needs in my community. I increased my license to care for 65 families and gainfully employed a total of 12 full-time early childhood educators. This all happened in a quick snap of 6 months! Fast forward to 2021 when I noticed that a small childcare facility right down the road from mine was looking to sell. From 2018-2021 my childcare business grew from 12 children to 120 children. From one employee to 20 employees. To date, our childcare programs have 78 families on our waitlist. To add, we turn away on average 2-3 families a week. Childcare is in a crisis because we cannot open enough spots to care for the amount of children who need us. Families who need us.

In order to provide care for more children we need to discuss the crisis surrounding employee recruitment and retention

I invite you to listen to Sasha's story

Sasha is a resident of our beautiful state, a mom of two young children, a full-time preschool teacher and childcare site manager, she is also a part time to full time employee of Southern Maine Healthcare, she is ALSO a full-time student at the University of Farmington where she majors in early childhood education Monday-Friday Sasha works 8a-5p as a preschool teacher in a classroom of 10-11 bustling and energetic three year olds! She leaves work by 5 each day, arrives home by 5:30 at which time she spends feeding and participating in her children's nighttime routines After tucking her children into bed, she hops onto her computer to log into her college classes at UMF Miss Sasha routine looks like this day in and day out M-F On Saturday and Sunday she spends her time working at Southern Maine Healthcare 6a-7p Her second job is needed to supplement her childcare wages Raising a family requires great financial responsibility On Saturday May 6, Sasha graduated from UMF with a bachelor's degree in early childhood education with a GPA of 3.8! The will and dedication it takes an individual to achieve this honor while being a full-time early childhood educator with managerial responsibilities' AND working a second job is commendable! Miss Sasha is an early childcare champion! She is dedicated to her own professional growth while teaching Maine's future population Since graduating on Saturday, Miss Sasha has wasted no time in applying to for a spot in the University of Maine at Farmington's master's education program It is the tenacity and dedication that Miss Sasha presents, that is NEEDED in the ECE field Our families and children deserve to have educators such as Miss Sasha But I worry about educators like Miss Sasha, and the reality of sustaining multiple jobs while working in childcare

Maine's current childcare wage averaging 15.42 an hour it is almost impossible for business owners and directors to keep educated and skilled professionals in our field Childcare professionals on average work between 40-50 hours per week Most business owners cannot afford to offer employees any type of health benefit to or paid medical leave Childcare educators are part of 2% of lowest paid population of professionals in our state and in our nation Educators are leaving the childcare profession every day to seek employment with higher starting wages and benefits packages Often times the only solution business owners and directors have when employees leave, is to close classrooms and tell families that today, due to staffing challenges, their child cannot come into the childcare program Regardless of the waitlist of families who need us, classrooms are closing across the state at a rapid pace!

LD 1726 an Act to Build Maine's Economy by supporting childcare for working families, sponsored by Senate President Troy Jackson, will help increase child care educator's wages by doubling the existing monthly wage supplement bonus from \$200 to \$400 This increase will bump the average hourly wage of educators to \$17.20 an hour, roughly \$35,700 a year

\$17.20 an hour is not a solution but it is a start A step in the right direction to help business owners and directors keep our doors open for Maine's working families who need us