

LD 1726

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

Health & Human Services Committee

Testimony of:

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Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Health and Human Services Committee, my name is Melissa Harding and I am a mom of four amazing little humans I am a resident of Waldo County and I'm here today testifying in support of LD 1726 An Act to Build Maine's Economy by Supporting Child Care and Working Families

I have struggled since moving to Maine and growing my family with access to childcare Shortly after I moved here I heard the term daycare desert for the first time I did not understand it then, and I do not understand anymore today I did not qualify for Head Start and we could not afford the one option that was a forty minute drive away The silver lining of covid for my family was that when my husband lost his job we became Head Start eligible, and it truly changed my life I wish that we did not have to be in a financial crisis to be eligible but my local Head Start agency became like family to me and the support my family received is something I will never forget They do this because they LOVE what they do Unfortunately over the course of my son's time in this program we have had several teachers who LOVED what they do leave, not because they wanted to, but because they had to My Son turned three and was accepted into the Pre-K program that was even closer to my home and I was so excited, it meant I would not spend two hours a day transporting him to and from school from Jackson to Belfast, my girls were not able to do this because four year olds take priority Unfortunately before he could transition to that classroom the staffing issue got worse and they were not able to accommodate him in the classroom This has now resulted in him being removed from Early Head Start and now he will return home with me and wait until he is hopefully able to return to a classroom in September Leaving a six month gap in early learning for a little boy who loves to go to school This is also going to drastically affect my family financially as I will have to reduce my hours and income We made so much progress and now we start over again This is the case for way too many families trying to dig themselves out of poverty and causes parents to have to leave the workforce too, the ripple effect for communities is not sustainable Our Early Childhood Educators are superheroes, and they deserve to be paid way more than the increases this bill would provide However we need to start somewhere We can not keep losing these incredible educators to the public school system or the McDonalds that is offering a higher wage and better benefits While classrooms continue to remain closed due to staffing, and children remain on waiting lists, we know better We all know it does not make sense, we all know that they deserve a livable wage, we all know that parents should not have to be home and leave the workforce because they can not access quality child care If we do not solve the workforce issue within Early Childhood Education then it isn't going to get better anywhere else It is time to acknowledge their worth, and not with words, with ACTION It starts here with voting in favor of LD 1726

Thank you for your time,
Melissa Harding