

Testimony of Rebekah Collins

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 Rebekah Collins and I am an elementary school teacher and a parent of young children. I'm testifying in support of LD 1726 An Act to Build Maine's Economy by Supporting Child Care and Working Families.

In order for a family of four to qualify for child care subsidy they have to make less than \$84,076.90 a year. The average cost of childcare in Kennebec county for two children under 5 is \$20,800 a year. This is 25% of their income. If a family makes slightly over these income guidelines they will be paying almost a quarter of their income towards childcare. This is a substantial financial burden on these families. My family decided for me to stay home for 5 years because if I was working we would not qualify for childcare assistance but we would not be able to make enough to pay our bills after paying for childcare. I have multiple friends that have had similar experiences. People that were willing, able and qualified to do jobs in education, social services and medical fields but could not take those jobs because they did not qualify for childcare assistance. We have major concerns in our state about our workforce shortage. One of the main ways that we can help increase our workforce is by making childcare more accessible. One way to do this is by raising the income limits for child care subsidies. No family should be paying 25% of their income towards childcare.

Our childcare providers are entrusted with one of our state's most precious things, our children. Our families need to trust that their children will be safe and cared for. In order for parents to trust their children in a childcare setting they want to know that they are being cared for by highly qualified staff. These staff members require training, education and experience. They deserve to be compensated at a level that respects that experience and education. According to the Bureau of Labor statistics the average salary for a childcare worker in Maine is \$15.42 an hour. For an employee that works 40 hours a week this works out to \$32,700 a year. Most of these positions require an associate's degree. Working in childcare is a hard job. These caregivers are being given responsibility for a human being. They do more than just care for children. They teach them, they comfort them, they encourage them and they help them grow. Their contribution to our society is imperative and they need to be compensated fairly for that contribution.

I encourage you to put the needs of children and families first by strengthening childcare.

Thank you