

Hello- My name is Brittney Shields Grant and I am a parent of three children, a Maine State Parent Ambassador, and a member of the parent board for Miss Jordyn's Childcare and Preschool. I am here to testify in support of LD1726 An Act to Build Maine's Economy by Supporting Childcare and Working Families. I'd like to start by thanking you for spending so much of your time listening to testimony from parents, educators and administrators of childcare centers. High quality childcare is hard to come by and expensive when available, though the benefits are abundant. The National Association for the Education of Young Child (NAEYC) states that low wages are a significant barrier to attracting and retaining qualified early childhood educators. Many early childhood educators earn poverty-level wages, which can lead to high turnover rates and a lack of stability for young children. This high turnover rate has a negative impact on the quality of care that young children receive (NAEYC 2021). According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), the median hourly wage for childcare workers in May 2020 was \$12.24, which is significantly lower than the median hourly wage for all workers, which was \$20.17. The BLS also reports that the annual mean wage for childcare workers in May 2020 was \$25,460, while the annual mean wage for all workers was \$56,310 (BLS 2021). Why does it matter?

Because as research shows, investing in quality early childhood education can have significant long-term benefits, including increased earnings, improved health outcomes, and reduced involvement in the criminal justice system. It can also have significant economic benefits, including increased productivity, reduced healthcare costs, and decreased reliance on social welfare programs (NAEYC 2021).

And I know that research is helpful, but researchers aren't the ones writing my story- the real life accounts of childcare in the past 5 years. I became a single mom of two children in 2018- two daughters, ages 3 and 1. I wasn't able to secure reasonably priced childcare but did not qualify for assistance. The choice was to pay for our food and housing, or pay for a childcare center. A stay-at-home mom was able to watch the girls for me, and I relied heavily on family to watch them as well. I finally located a center that could watch them and here comes the old adage - "you get what you pay for". Shortly after enrolling, when going to pick my daughter up for an appointment, I walked in to discover the provider napping with the youngest children in a dark room while the 3-5 year olds were unattended at the kitchen table. We pulled the children from that center and Miss Jordyn's Childcare posted an opening not long after in December of 2019. In January 2020, they were able to start attending Miss Jordyn's, but my husband began working extra EMT shifts around his nursing classes to help accommodate the price. In March, when the world shut down for COVID, these teachers set up Zoom meets with their classrooms. When it reopened, our children were ecstatic to go back to those teachers. 3 years later, we have lost most of their favorite teachers. Yes, it might be said that change is natural for many people and the employees won't be there forever. And absolutely, some go on to school based positions, but then we see the others at an entry level position- a cashier at a hardware store, a teller at a bank, a receptionist at a local business. They could get benefits and better pay at these positions. They're not nearly as passionate about paperwork or power tools, but they couldn't afford to live while employed at a childcare center. These teachers build relationships so strong they come back to visit. The tear-filled goodbyes on teachers last days are enough to rip a parents heart out. Teaching is selfless- absolutely selfless. So many teachers and

childcare providers are scraping by, just to be with our kids day in and day out. Just last week, we got word that the after school program is only available 4 days a week due to resignations. In some cases, these program closures pull a nurse from an ER, a provider from a orthopedic office, or a CNA from a nursing home. And one of those resignations? Another favorite teacher. I'm prepping my kids for yet another heart wrenching goodbye. Providers need to be able to pay working wages and sustain themselves and parents shouldn't have to work overtime in order to afford childcare. It is in no way just parents who suffer, or children, or childcare providers. It is employers. It is hospitals. It is small businesses. It is Maine.

Reference

Bureau of Labor Statistics (2021) Occupational Employment and Wages May 2020 Retrieved from <https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes399011.htm>

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