

131st Legislature
Senate of
Maine
Senate District 2

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**LD 1988, “An Act to Provide Critical Matching Funds for Child Care Services
on the Northern Maine Community College Campus”**

**Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs
May 24, 2023**

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and Distinguished Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs:

I am Senator Trey Stewart; and I represent District 2, which includes several municipalities in Aroostook County and Northern Penobscot County. I am here today to present to you LD 1988, “*An Act to Provide Critical Matching Funds for Child Care Services on the Northern Maine Community College Campus.*”

As you can see, this measure is simple – it allocates one-time funding to capture matching funds provided for child care services on the campus of Northern Maine Community College (NMCC).

We are all very well aware of the critical child care shortage throughout the state, Northern Maine being no exception. Northern Maine Community College is ready and excited to be able to provide a healthy, safe, nurturing environment for children. Having a reliable local provider allows parents to maintain employment which, in turn, only strengthens our economy.

With the staggering rate in which child care facilities have been closing coupled with a critical labor shortage, the demand for child care is not being met. Furthermore, if a family in Aroostook County is even able to find child care, the distance traveling to and from work and home oftentimes is a major barrier. This investment would assist NMCC’s Early Childhood Education Program get accredited, enticing students to join the program which will, in turn, increase the number of child care workers.

Another point I want to make, as is the case with most state funded institutions, there is a backlog of deferred maintenance. Because this bill supports a renovation of existing space, it supports an investment in helping to fix a portion of that backlog, thus improving those figures.

Finally, it's very important to note the College has raised a considerable amount of money privately via the NMCC Foundation's efforts. This additional funding will help secure the plan for work on the expansion to begin this fall. I'm told there is an additional \$1.5 million in a matching private donation that will likely be lost if this measure does not pass. This bill is unlike other initiatives commonly seen in this building, as it is for matching funds, rather than paying the entire amount of a new project.

The one-time \$1 million allocation in this bill will reap benefits for years to come – possibly generations. This bill will have exponential benefits for our state's child care problem—both addressing the immediate needs by opening a new childcare facility within the next year, as well injecting new child care providers in the near future by increasing access to child care education at the same time. Truly, this idea is innovative; and the time is ripe for the project to benefit Aroostook County and beyond. Please support this measure and send this bill to the Appropriations Table where we can continue to advocate for innovative solutions to this problem.

I appreciate your time and thoughtful consideration.