

Testimony of Heather Marden
On behalf of the Maine Association for the Education of Education

**Testimony In Support of LD 1964, An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the
Commission to Develop a Paid Family and Medical Leave Benefits Program**

May 25, 2023

Dear Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing,

I'm Heather Marden, Co-Executive Director of the Maine Association for the Education of Young Children (MaineAEYC). MaineAEYC promotes high-quality early learning for each and every child, birth through age 8, by connecting practice, policy, and research. We advance a diverse, dynamic early childhood profession and support all who care for, educate, and work on behalf of young children.

Across Maine we have over 1500 licensed child care programs. While child care has become hard for families to access, families with newborn babies find greater barriers than most to access quality child care.

Licensed child care programs in Maine cannot accept infants under 6 weeks of age. Yet in Maine, many parents have to get back into the workforce after just a few weeks. In this scenario, where do the babies go?

Parents make the choice to leave the workforce sacrificing financial health or they may be forced to piece together care options that do not support the important attachment processes that need to happen for infants for optimal early development.

If a parent can make it to six weeks without needing child care, then they are tasked with the nearly impossible feat of trying to obtain safe, quality care available at that time. Child care waitlists for infants are extremely long across Maine. It is common that families start to get on waitlists at the first knowledge they are expecting. It has become a trend to hear mother's say, "I called child care programs before I even told my husband we were expecting." This is the reality of pregnant people. Instead of reveling in the blessing of the child to come, they are already stressing how to piece together the future care of that child.

We can do better, providing a comprehensive Paid Family Medical Leave plan would allow families the necessary and precious time to care for their newborns and also navigate the challenging climate of securing child care to proceed in their careers.

In a recent survey we conducted, we estimated a gap of around 5,000 infants who potentially do not have access to child care in Maine. We must have better family friendly policies that allow

families to have the time for care in the earliest weeks and prepare for care schedules facing them. <https://maineaeyc.org/public-policy-advocacy>

In addition, those who work in child care do not have access to comprehensive PFML plans themselves. In Maine's 2021 Market Rate survey which provides data about child care benefits, only 62% of child care employers offer paid sick leave and even among those who do, the average amount of time is 8 days. If someone working in child care (and we hear these stories often) incur a medical emergency, they go unpaid. I myself found myself in this situation after working in the field for 18 years. I had to have surgery and needed 6 weeks off from work. My employer at the child care center I worked at, while not able to afford a paid family and medical leave plan, did try to help me and provided some extra pay but could not cover the full 6 weeks. Child care educators earn in the bottom 2% of wages across the country. They cannot sustain lost wages in medical emergencies for themselves or their families. This is a child care friendly policy and would bring an unattainable benefit into the child care workforce and support these small businesses across Maine affording this type of benefit which many would love to provide their employees.

I hope you will support LD 1964. Thank you for listening, I'm happy to answer any questions.