



**maineaeYC**

Maine Association for the  
Education of Young Children

Testimony of Heather Marden

On behalf of the Maine Association for the Education of Young Children

In support of

LD 1877: An Act to Reduce the Number of Children Living in Deep Poverty by Adjusting  
Assistance for Low-income Families

2/1/024

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Health and Human Services Committee, my name is Heather Marden and I am writing on behalf 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.*

Poverty is a condition that is often misconstrued as merely lacking resources. However, for children who come from impoverished backgrounds, the implications of their circumstances can be long-lasting. Poverty can negatively impact the child's development, even leading to changes in the brain's fundamental architecture, causing it to be generational.

During the first five years of life, a child's brain undergoes the most rapid development compared to any other time in their life. While genetics play a significant role, scientific research reveals that the quality of a child's experiences in their early years - both positive and negative - influences how their brain develops. These experiences have a lasting impact on the child's health, capacity to learn, and success in school and beyond.

Children growing up in poverty fall behind their economically secure peers early in life. Starting in infancy, deficiencies are noticeable in crucial aspects of learning, knowledge, and social-emotional development. When these disparities are left unaddressed, they become increasingly wide over time. Early optimal growth tends to open doors for further optimal development, while impoverished development tends to close those doors. Therefore, poor children often lag behind their peers when entering kindergarten,

in reading ability at the end of third grade, executive functioning skills, and school attendance in eighth grade. Poor children are more likely to drop out of school or not pursue post-secondary education.

It's widely accepted that merely providing resources to children from impoverished backgrounds is insufficient to solve the problem. We must strengthen our two-generational approaches to support both the family and the child. Supporting economic stability, like the proposed increases and fixes in this bill for the TANF program, can reduce the financial stressors that families face when putting food on the table, paying for child care, or repairing their car so they can make it to work. Income support enhances children's social and economic outcomes throughout their lifetime by allowing families to meet their basic needs and increasing their income stability.

TANF funding is integral in paying for child care for qualified families. This supports children in having access to enriching early learning programs while adults can attend gaining and maintaining employment, training or higher education.

To care for Maine's children and strengthen the future outcomes has to come at the willingness to support their families. Please support LD 1877.