



# **MAINE AFL-CIO**

**A Union of Unions Standing for Maine Workers**  
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**Testimony in support of LD 2199, An Act to Ensure Subsidy Reimbursements and Emergency  
Financial Assistance for Certain Childcare Providers**  
**Sarah Bigney McCabe, Maine AFL-CIO**  
**February 20, 2024**

Good afternoon, members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is Sarah Bigney McCabe, I live in Skowhegan, and I am here today representing the members of the Maine AFL-CIO. We represent 40,000 working men and women in Maine and we work to improve the lives and working conditions of our members and all working people. We support LD 2199.

I testified before you last year accompanied by my then one-year old, now two-year old son Sam. I dropped him off this morning with his wonderful childcare provider Delores, or D as the kids all call her, which is probably for the best as these days he much less likely to be quiet for three minutes.

Last year I shared with you our story, that I got on waiting lists for childcare when I was pregnant, didn't get a spot, eventually had to cut back working to part time and depend on grandparents to patch it together. We didn't get a spot in daycare until Sam was 15 months old.

Through talking with other families with young children, I came to realize that we were far from alone in this struggle.

At the Maine AFL-CIO we put out a survey last year to our members asking folks to share their experiences with childcare, and to be honest, I have never seen such a strong response to a survey we have put out. Stories poured in of the struggle to access, and to afford, childcare. Nurses, fire fighters, workers at the Shipyard, union members and non-union members, hundreds of people shared with us how they have searched high and low for care, and the lengths they have had to go through to just be able to go to work. A significant number of them have had to leave the workforce or cut back to part time, not because they wanted to, but because of the lack of childcare.

This legislature heard these stories from Maine's working families, and took action. We were so pleased that the comprehensive bill passed and was funded last year.

However, as you are hearing today, there's a missing link, and until it is fixed, the system is still broken. Childcare providers are reimbursed on attendance, not enrollment.

It's really simple – if the providers can't afford to accept the subsidy because it doesn't cover their costs, then families can't use it, and there are fewer options. We're back at ground zero. Families will continue to struggle to find and to afford childcare, and will continue to leave the workforce.

This is really not fair for the families who need the subsidy. If they can't find daycare providers who accept it, especially in rural areas where options are few, they are out of luck. They either can't work, or have to spend a small fortune to be able to go to work.

If you have had small children, you may remember how often they get sick. Sam can't go to daycare when he gets sick, and that's a good policy. It's nobody's fault, and you can't see it coming. Young children are building their immune systems, and it feels like we get a new virus every two or three weeks. These past two winters have been especially hard with respiratory viruses. There's literally hundreds of reels and memes about it that me and my fellow moms send each other while we are trapped underneath napping sick children.

When Sam is unexpectedly out, D has already bought groceries for the week. She has to pay her bills. Her expenses do not change because Sam doesn't attend. She shouldn't have to absorb that cost for kids who stay home sick. If we want to prevent more daycares from closing, and support the ones that are open, and if we want Maine workers to be able to find and afford childcare, we need to pass this bill and make this important change.

What I haven't told you is how absolutely wonderful our childcare provider is. Sam is flourishing because of his time there. He calls it his school, and it really is—he has learned so much from her. D has the patience of a saint, a heart of gold, and teaches these kids so much. We feel so fortunate to have her and her family as a part of our extended family. She is an absolute professional. I have no idea how she does it all. We know that early childhood education is crucial to children's success. I urge you to support Maine working families, and support childcare workers, by voting ought to pass on LD 2199. Thank you.