



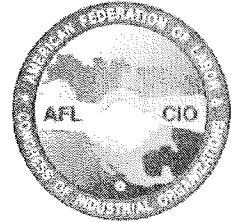
MAINE AFL-CIO

A Union of Unions Standing for Maine Workers

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Testimony on LD 2214
February 26, 2024

Good morning, members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs. My name is Sarah Bigney McCabe, I live in Skowhegan, and I am here today on behalf 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. I am here today to speak neither for nor against LD 2214 in its entirety but in opposition to line 563, which delays or limits investments in our child care infrastructure.

It would be an understatement to say that we were disappointed to learn that this proposed supplemental budget rolls back the progress made last year on childcare.

The bill you passed last year to begin to fix our broken childcare infrastructure was one of the most important investments in working families I have ever seen. To delay and limit these crucial changes is a major blow to all of the hard working child care providers who are facing the decision to close their doors, to the ones who haven't taken home a paycheck in months. And it's a major blow to the families who are desperately seeking affordable, quality childcare for their children.

I told it here last year, and last week again in HHS, so I'll try to summarize our family's story briefly. I got on numerous waiting lists for daycare while I was pregnant. We didn't get a spot. After our son Sam was born and after my 10 weeks of paid leave, we still didn't have a spot. I had no choice but to cut back my hours to part time, and depended on my mom driving from Eddington to Skowhegan and back two days a week so I could work. One day a week my husband and I worked from home with the baby and winged it, which was only mildly successful until Sam started crawling. We finally did get a spot when he was 15 months old.

What are families supposed to do? Without a flexible and understanding employer and the ability to keep your job but work part time, and without family nearby who could help, one of us would have had to leave the workforce.

We are thrilled now that Sam goes to Delores Alberico's wonderful childcare right near our home in Skowhegan. He learns so much every single day. He is growing and thriving. All the kids adore D, and she is a blessing to our family and to our entire community. It was worth the wait, and worth every penny. Early childcare education is fundamental and crucial to children's success. These providers are doing so much for our society.

This experienced opened my eyes and I realized I was far, far from alone. Families across Maine are struggling with this childcare crisis. At the Maine AFL-CIO we put out a survey to our members asking what folks experience with childcare is. The response was very telling. Hundreds of people responded. Can't find care, can't afford care if you are lucky enough to find it, had to leave the workforce, stress and struggle. I have never seen a single issue impact so many people across the state, across sectors of the workforce. Nurses, fire fighters, workers at the Shipyard, teachers, the responses rolled in from families failing to find and afford childcare.

Is anyone else in this room paying for daycare right now? It's like having a second mortgage. I'm fortunate that I only have one child in daycare right now. It's just about as much as our mortgage. Having two in daycare would be financially out of the question for my family.

You heard the cries working families and employers alike, and you acted. It was a huge step forward. The bad news is, this proposal before you un-does the good you did. The problem has not been solved—and people are waiting for relief. You enacted real solutions that, when implemented, will make a real positive difference.

I know the level of stress, anxiety and worry this caused for me and our family and I know that tens of thousands of Maine families are dealing with that. So I feel angry, disappointed, and like a promise was broken. This measure became law - and now here we are it's as if that never happened.

The legislation you passed and funded raised the income threshold for families to qualify for the state childcare subsidy. This would be huge for hard working families who are struggling to make ends meet and barely getting by.

This proposal delays implementation of the changes to income eligibility for child care subsidies until July 1, 2024. It delays implementation of including child care staff in the Maine Child Care Affordability Program until July 1, 2024 and changes the program to be a 2-year pilot program. It fails to carry forward \$4.4 million in funding for monthly child care stipends. These funds are needed to cover the costs of retroactive payments and the increased payments to providers moving up the Quality Rating Scale – as this program was designed to do.

These changes are being proposed now, after Governor Mills said in a July 11, 2023, press statement that *“these changes would take effect in January 2024.”*

There is no reason to walk this progress backwards. It hasn't even had a chance to start to work, to help people. Please reject these proposed reversals of the good you did last year, and give much needed relief to Maine working families and Maine childcare providers. Thank you.