



## Maine Education Association

**Jesse Hargrove** *President*  
**Beth French** *Vice President*  
**Jaye Rich** *Treasurer*  
**Rebecca Cole** *NEA Director*  
**Rachelle Bristol** *Executive Director*

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and distinguished members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,

My name is Jesse Hargrove, I am a high school social studies teacher on leave to serve as Maine Education Association President. The MEA represents nearly 24,000 educators, many of whom are parents and/or grandparents. Our members include teachers and other educators in nearly every public school in the state, full-time faculty and other professional and support staff in both the University of Maine and Community College systems, and thousands of retired educators.

I offer this testimony today on behalf of the MEA in SUPPORT of LD 437, *An Act Directing the Department of Education to Develop Pilot Programs to Place Child Care Facilities in Selected School Administrative Units.*

I shared this bill with my wife, a music educator, earlier this week. Her enthusiastic support far exceeded that of the day I proposed marriage. We were fortunate as early career educators starting a family, to find a home-based provider. Despite this, we still experienced a variety of challenges that lead us to speculate on this very topic over a decade ago.

Even as my kids aged out of childcare, I began to realize my colleagues faced challenges were very similar to, and even greater than, my own. Childcare is a key cog in our economic infrastructure providing parents with the security and availability to meet the demands of a 21<sup>st</sup> century economy. Schools, no doubt, play a role in providing that family support. We shouldn't be surprised that folks who have dedicated years of study and professional ambition serving other people's kids, would have kids of their own. We can help mitigate the educator shortage, including teachers and education technicians, by boosting our childcare infrastructure in the most logical places—our schools.

Mainers across the state face difficulties finding childcare, but school personnel often face additional challenges. For instance, schools open early in the morning to accommodate working parents, requiring school employees – such as bus drivers, ed techs, kitchen staff, teachers, guidance counselors, and administrators—to find care outside of traditional hours. This challenge is exacerbated by commute times. In Maine it is normal for folks to commute 30 minutes or more. Consequently, school employees may need childcare as early as 6:30 in the morning, so that they can be ready for their students. Of course, many schools have rotating schedules for bus duty, morning recess, breakfast, or IEP meetings requiring even earlier arrival. All things that pose a challenge for educators needing childcare.

Many folks outside of education think school ends between 2:15 and 3:15 PM. In reality most educators' afternoons are filled with faculty meetings, curriculum team meetings, data team meetings,

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department meetings, parent meetings meeting, IEP Meetings, student club activities, and providing individual supports for students after hours. Leaving school after 4:00 PM is the norm for many of our educators, meaning that their kids have already been in childcare for close to 10 hours. The extra care, either due to earlier drop-off, or total time, usually means educators will have to pay additional fees.

Childcare is more like paying rent, than a mechanic. Parents pay for the “slot” or “space” by entering a contract with the provider; you pay a set amount for that “slot”, regardless of usage— sick days, family vacations, school recess, or summer recess. Different providers have different terms, however educators who may choose to keep their kid(s) with them during summer recess generally have to pay an additional fee to retain the “slot”. Furthermore, these slots are becoming scarcer. Many of my colleagues experience waiting lists, lasting years into the future, which has resulted in some of them taking leaves of absence.

These challenges can be alleviated by establishing childcare facilities within our public schools. This would help align daily schedules and the school year calendar with childcare services, minimizing transition times, and maximizing educator attention to their students. It would also reduce the fees for early drop-off, and summer break retainers. Providing educators with easy access to childcare, regardless of out-of-pocket expenses, would provide peace of mind, enabling school employees to better serve students and the school community.

I urge your support for LD 437 to explore childcare in public schools.