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April 2, 2025

Attn: Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs  
Maine House of Representatives  
2 State House Sta, Augusta, ME 04333

Subject: LD 174

Dear Representatives,

I am writing to share the profound impact that LD 798 has had on both my business and the families in my local community. As the founder and director of Nature Play All Day, a licensed nature-based child care program in Knox County, I have witnessed firsthand the devastating consequences of this legislation on families seeking early childhood education.

Nature Play All Day opened in June 2024 with a waitlist of 47 families from Knox, Waldo, Lincoln counties, and beyond—each one eager to join our program. Yet not a single family met eligibility requirements due to their decision to decline vaccinations for personal, religious, or philosophical reasons. In just ten months, I've had to turn away more than 20 new families—nearly half of them in the last ten weeks alone—despite their deep alignment with our values and vision. Meanwhile, I continue to receive weekly enrollment inquiries, many of which come through our growing free community offering, Nature Playgroup. These families are seeking not just childcare, but connection, belonging, and a place where their children can thrive. This is not a matter of fit or readiness—it is a matter of access. How can we claim to support Maine families while stripping them of the right to make personal choices and simultaneously removing their access to safe, enriching care?

This is not just an issue for my program—this law bars families from any licensed childcare setting in the state, including daycares, public schools, private schools, and charter schools. As a result, families are left with no options, both Maine families and childcare providers feel the weight of these limitations. Many passionate educators and caregivers are now forced to operate “under the radar” or in the gray areas of regulation just to provide care to families who desperately need it. These providers take on tremendous risk, as operating outside of licensing regulations puts them in danger of fines if discovered and eliminates any possibility of receiving staff stipends or state funding, something on which many licensed childcare providers depend on.

Early childhood service providers are already overworked and underpaid. We do this work because we believe in the right of every child to have access to quality care and a strong sense of belonging within their community. However, the current system is making it nearly impossible to serve families in need while maintaining both financial and legal security.

I have relentlessly pursued every possible avenue to structure my program in a way that allows me to remain licensed while still serving these families, but time and again, I have been met with roadblocks. The reality is that families in Maine are being denied not only quality childcare but also the support, stability, and community that they rightly deserve.

As a business owner, educator, and advocate for accessible early childhood education, I urge you to consider the real and lasting effects this law has on families and small childcare providers like myself. It is my hope that Maine can create pathways for inclusion while maintaining safety and quality care for all children.

Childcare providers should not have to choose between following the law and serving their communities. Families should not have to sacrifice their livelihoods because they cannot access care. This law is not just limiting options—it is dismantling the very foundation of support that children and families rely on.

Since 2019, a quiet but devastating domino effect has been unfolding across our state. I've heard directly from families who have become single-income households—not by choice, but by necessity—because one parent must now stay home to provide full-time care. Ironically, this loss of income then disqualifies them from accessing the very childcare subsidies designed to support working families. The burden compounds. The cracks widen.

These families repeatedly express a kind of stoic frustration—carrying the weight of their circumstances with quiet resilience, yet with a deep and growing sense of isolation. They feel cut off from programs that would otherwise be a perfect fit for their children and their values—programs that could offer not just care, but meaningful community, belonging, and the chance to thrive. The loss is not just logistical—it's deeply relational.

I write not only as a provider, but as a voice for the many families who are silently struggling to hold all the pieces together—those who have been pushed into these impossible positions and are often too afraid to speak up for fear of stigma or consequence. I carry their stories with me and am committed to advocating on their behalf until their needs are seen, heard, and meaningfully addressed.

I appreciate your time and dedication to the well-being of Maine's families and children. I welcome the opportunity to discuss this further and share more about the experiences of the families affected.

With gratitude,

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