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Maine Association for the Education of Young Children



Testimony of Heather Marden
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(MaineAEYC)
Submitted on Behalf of MaineAEYC and the Family Child Care Association of Maine
In Support of LD 1469: An Act to Amend the Quality Rating System for Child Care
Services in Maine
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
April 23, 2025

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Health and Human Services Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony in strong support of LD 1469, *An Act to Amend the Quality Rating System for Child Care Services in Maine*. My name is Heather Marden, and I serve as the Co-Executive Director of the Maine Association for the Education of Young Children (MaineAEYC). I am also submitting this testimony on behalf of the Family Child Care Association of Maine.

Together, our organizations represent a broad membership of child care professionals across the state—including family child care providers, center-based programs, and early educators—who are dedicated to delivering high-quality early care and education to Maine's children and families.

LD 1469 offers what we feel is a fair fix to an additional burden placed on some nationally accredited programs—a burden that requires them to meet extra state-specific criteria to be rated at the highest level in Maine's quality system, even when they already meet or exceed nationally recognized benchmarks. These added hurdles create confusion for families and disincentivize providers who have already demonstrated excellence through rigorous national standards.

Accreditation from respected national organizations—such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), the National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC), the Council on Accreditation (COA), and federally reviewed Head Start programs—requires comprehensive evaluation. These programs excel in areas like curriculum quality, staff credentials, health and safety, and family partnerships.

We also strongly support the proposed amendment to include programs accredited by the National Montessori Association among those automatically recognized at the Star 5 level. These programs meet high standards consistent with other nationally recognized accrediting bodies and should be included in Maine's framework accordingly.

In the current system, an accredited program might not achieve a Star 5 rating in *Rising Stars for ME* unless they complete additional Maine-specific requirements—specifically requirements around staffing levels of education.

Below you can see the Staffing and Professional Development Standards for Head Start and Center Based Care.



Rising Stars for ME Standards: Facilities (13 or more children), Licensed and License-Exempt

Standard 3: Staff Qualifications and Professional Development				
Star 1★	Star 2★★	Star 3★★★	Star 4★★★★	Star 5★★★★★
To attain and maintain Star 1, a program must meet the following Requirements, as defined by the Child Care Subsidy Program Rules:	To attain and maintain Star 2, a program must be licensed.	To attain and maintain Star 3, a program must meet the following Requirements:	To attain and maintain Star 4, a program must continue to meet Star 3 Requirements AND meet the following Requirements:	To attain and maintain Star 5, a program must continue to meet Star 3 & 4 Requirements AND meet the following Requirements:
There are no Requirements in this Standard for Star 1.	There are no Requirements in this Standard for Star 2.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> For programs serving children ages six weeks to kindergarten and/or mixed age programs: At least 50% of Lead Teachers are at a Level 5 or above on the MRTQ Direct Care Career Lattice. For programs serving school age children ONLY: At least 25% of staff working twenty or more hours per week are at a Level 3 or above on the MRTQ Direct Care Career Lattice. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> For programs serving children ages six weeks to kindergarten and/or mixed age programs: At least 50% of all permanent/regular staff are at least a Level 5 or above on the MRTQ Direct Care Career Lattice. For programs serving school age children ONLY: At least 50% of all staff working at least twenty hours per week are at least a Level 3 on the MRTQ Direct Care Career Lattice. All staff create an individual annual Professional Development Plan addressing their 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> The program holds current accreditation from: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) The American Montessori Society (AMS) The Council on Accreditation (COA) <p>OR meets performance standards as evaluated by Head Start.</p>

Family Child Care Staff Qualifications and Professional Standards:



Rising Stars for ME Standards: Family Child Care (12 or fewer children), Licensed and License-Exempt

Standard 3: Staff Qualifications and Professional Development				
Star 1★	Star 2★★	Star 3★★★	Star 4★★★★	Star 5★★★★★
To attain and maintain Star 1, a program must meet the following Requirements, as defined by the Child Care Subsidy Program Rules:	To attain and maintain Star 2, a program must be licensed.	To attain and maintain Star 3, a program must attain a Star 2 and meet the following Requirements:	To attain and maintain Star 4, a program must continue to meet Star 3 Requirements AND meet the following Requirements:	To attain and maintain Star 5, a program must continue to meet Star 3 & 4 Requirements AND meet the following Requirements:
There are no Requirements in this Standard for Star 1.	There are no Requirements in this Standard for Star 2.	1. The Program Owner is at a Level 3 or above on the MRTQ Direct Care Career Lattice.	1. The Program Owner is at a Level 4 or above on the MRTQ Direct Care Career Lattice. 2. The Program Owner and any staff create an individual annual Professional Development Plan addressing their training and education goals.	1. The program holds current accreditation from the National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC) or the American Montessori Society (AMS).

Star 5 indicates that Accreditation is required but also states a program must meet Star 3 and 4 requirements as well. While we have seen a positive trend of growth in the child care workforce because of steps taken by the Legislature to invest in wages and workforce support, there is still volatility in turnover in the workforce and consistent investment of programs to invest in professional development plans for staff. Therefore, we feel that the programs who are putting in the resources and efforts for accreditation standards should not be at the whim of a workforce shortage they have no ability to control.

This misalignment affects not only providers, but also the families who choose them:

- Families receiving support through the Child Care Affordability Program (CCAP) get a 20% reduction in their parent fee if their program is rated at Star 5. But if their provider is nationally accredited and still isn't awarded Star 5 due to state criteria, they lose out on that benefit.
- Similarly, those families may miss the opportunity to claim the double state child care tax credit, even while enrolled in a top-tier program.

Early childhood professionals are already working under intense pressure—navigating staffing shortages, limited resources, and growing expectations. When they go the extra mile to meet national standards of excellence, our systems should honor that—not ask them to go even further without reason. We feel this change would also incentivize more programs to consider accreditation processes if they knew it could earn them a Star 5 quality rating.

LD 1469 is a thoughtful and practical step to bring state policy into alignment with the nationally recognized quality that many Maine providers are already achieving. It will streamline recognition, reduce redundancy, and help more families access the savings and supports they deserve.

We urge the committee to support this bill and its amendment. Thank you for your time and your commitment to Maine's children, families, and early childhood professionals.

Respectfully submitted,

Heather Marden

Co-Executive Director

Maine Association for the Education of Young Children (MaineAEYC)

On behalf of MaineAEYC and the Family Child Care Association of Maine

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