

May 15, 2025

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and Honorable Members of the Health and Human Services Committee:

My name is Kasey McBlais and I am a single mother from Buckfield, Maine. I am here to express the strongest of support for LD 1736, a bill that takes targeted, meaningful steps toward supporting Maine's child care system.

LD 1736 empowers OCFS to use contracts—rather than only subsidies—to directly support child care providers in delivering care for high-need populations, including infants and toddlers, children with disabilities, and families in underserved areas. My family fits into two of those categories: I have a 7 year old son with Autism, ADHD and anxiety and we live in rural Maine where there continues to be a childcare desert.

I will share with you a brief story about child care and my son – it's an extremely condensed version since I have less than 3 minutes now, but I am happy to meet one on one with each and every one of you at a later time to chat more.

Prior to my son being diagnosed, he went to an Early Head Start location in Western Maine. He was around 1.5 years old and it was a 45 minute drive one way. As weeks went by, my son began exhibiting behaviors that were challenging for the staff to manage and of course, that were difficult for my son. A little tiny human pushing other tiny humans, yelling and screaming is not a sign of a happy child. Head Start was great until it wasn't. I remember distinctly picking up my son one day and the Director happened to be on site. She came over and said to me "I just don't think your son is happy here." So I immediately began the process of withdrawing him and searching for other options. I do want to be clear that I remain a massive supporter of Head Start. Despite various visual charts, behavior management, and specialized support, they did the very best they could. I hope that your takeaway isn't that Head Start failed my son, but that the system and the state of Maine did.

So after scouring my area, I found one other child care option and it was a 30 minute drive one way. I count my blessings because some families in Maine travel even further. This new center was fantastic! Until it wasn't. It was super inclusive, the staff were well trained and there were even two way observation mirrors. One day in mid August I was informed that my son could no longer attend due to us not having a designated one on one aid – we had no involvement with Child Development Services at that point, but my son was needing more and more support and the center just did not have the resources. Again, did the center fail us or was it the system and the very state we live in?

I had two weeks to find another placement for my son. After scrambling I was able to enroll him into a two day/week public preK program with fingers crossed that it would be a good fit. This meant that I had to stop working full time and drop down to twenty hours a week, in order to stay home with him on the days he was not in school. I lost my medical insurance, including dental and vision. I no longer had paid time off – not even paid sick time.

Did you know that Maine loses an estimated **\$403 million annually** in lost earnings, productivity, and revenue due to child care challenges like the ones I just shared with you? I would hope that hearing stories from families like my own would be enough to convince the honorable members of this committee how significant bills like LD 1736 is, but I know that stats and data are also important. I know that money and the economy is important.

By voting in favor of this bill, you are sending a message to my son, who is now 7, that he matters. That families like ours matter. With respect, I urge you to vote yes for LD 1736. And for the record I also very strongly support LD 1955 and LD 1859.

Thank you for your time and commitment to Maine's children and families.

Respectfully,



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