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Testimony in Support of LD 1859, An Act to Improve Access to Child Care and Early Childhood Education by Establishing Regional Resource Hubs

May 15, 2025

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services,

My name is Sue Powers and I am an early childhood consultant from Mapleton, delivering testimony on behalf of the Maine Community Action Partnership, a statewide organization dedicated to improving the quality of life of Maine people by advocating for, promoting and supporting the work of the Maine community action agencies. I work with childcare providers and early childhood educators across the state to provide quality early care to families. I am writing today to express my strong support for LD 1859, and believe when combined with LD 1736, and LD 1955—will take meaningful strides toward solving Maine's childcare crisis.

LD 1859 directs the Department of Health and Human Services to establish regional early childhood learning and development resource hubs. These hubs will be affiliated with existing regional nonprofit organizations to promote early childhood learning, support family needs, and increase access to high-quality early childhood education. Key functions include conducting regional needs assessments, assisting parents in locating and applying for childcare programs, connecting families to local and state resources, supporting educators, and collaborating with employers and educators to meet local childcare needs.

Coming from Aroostook County I understand the childcare desert issue and it is real. Aroostook, like many regions in Maine, lacks sufficient childcare options for working families, making it challenging for families to find quality care so they can work and be stable, productive employees. LD 1859 aims to identify and address the gaps that exist by supporting employers, childcare providers and the community in general to remove barriers for working families.

In 2023, with the closure of a large childcare provider that left over 100 families without childcare and many employers without employees, a childcare task force emerged. The task force, made up of employers, school administrators, childcare providers, parents and other interested organizations came together to tackle the issue. As a result of this work, the Aroostook Childcare Resource Center was launched. The Resource Center, operating within United Way of Aroostook is funded entirely by employer sponsorship. Employers understand that to have productive employees they must have a reliable, stable, safe, quality childcare network.

The Aroostook model of the Resource Center mirrors a former system in Maine known as Resource Development Centers. When these centers operated in local communities, childcare providers thrived, and as a result, childcare was accessible. Returning to this model, in just four months, new childcare home enrollment opportunities are emerging. The model of bringing childcare professionals and community employers together to meet the childcare need works.

LD 1859 represents a strategic approach to strengthening Maine's early childhood infrastructure, ensuring that families have the support they need to access quality childcare and education services.

Together, these three bills offer a comprehensive response to Maine's child care challenges by strengthening supply, increasing affordability, supporting education, and honoring the workforce. I respectfully urge the committee to vote "Ought to Pass" on LD 1859, LD 1736 and LD 1955. Thank you for your time and commitment to Maine's children and families.