



Aroostook County Childcare Resource Center

An Initiative of United Way of Aroostook

☎ 207-768-0767

✉ melanie@unitedwayaroostook.org

🌐 aroostookccrc.org

LD 1859, An Act to Improve Access to Child Care and Early Childhood Education by Establishing Regional Resource Hubs Presented to Maine's Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

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

As the Director of the Aroostook County Childcare Resource Center I ask you to support LD 1859 an Act to Improve Access to Child Care and Early Childhood Education by Establishing Regional Resource Hubs.

Lack of accessible and affordable childcare is a growing economic problem for rural Maine. It is often cited as the top barrier to employment and acutely impacts the next generation of our workforce. Making matters worse, our current childcare providers are struggling to keep their doors open due to lack of staffing, regulatory burden, unpredictable revenue and increasing expenses. This has resulted in a brittle system that we collectively need to address.

Aroostook County has been actively seeking solutions to the childcare crisis and one solution that has been implemented is the Aroostook County Childcare Resource Center, which aligns impeccably with this proposed legislation.

The Aroostook Resource Center was formed by a local group of stakeholders out of the childcare crisis in Aroostook County. We are designed as an initiative under the United Way of Aroostook, which has allowed us to be a neutral party in childcare and to leverage the stability and relationships the United Way has within the community. We operate under an advisory board which consists of providers, parents, businesses, Aroostook's CAP program, higher education, and financial institutions. Our mission includes supporting families, providers, businesses and the community to foster a resilient childcare infrastructure. All of our current funding is locally sourced from private contributions. We have applied for Congressionally Directed Spending to expand our efforts with recruiting and training the childcare workforce, which will directly impact the availability and quality of care offered to children and families.

Most of our early work has focused on stabilizing our current providers by assisting with recruiting staff and leveraging financial and business support. Our work with families has mostly centered on finding creative solutions to childcare as there are rarely any open slots anywhere in Aroostook, especially after the loss of two large centers and other providers leaving the field. We have also encouraged and supported families with applying for CCAP, despite the ongoing waitlist.

The Resource Center collaborates closely with First 4 ME and has been developing relationships with all available resources for families and providers throughout the state. We also work closely with licensing and other programs through OCFS to offer assistance to current and hopeful providers. These connections are vital to support our most rural childcare providers, as they may not always know what is out there or how to access the support.

Childcare is a complex system that impacts every aspect of our community and economy. Hubs like the Aroostook Resource Center will support stabilizing and expanding providers to meet the needs of families and businesses, while emphasizing the quality of care our children receive.

Best,
Melanie Tompkins, LCSW
Director, ACCRC