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**Testimony in support of LD 1955, an Act to Increase Child Care Affordability and Early Childhood Educator Stability**

**May 15, 20205**

Good morning Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and members of the Health and Human Services Committee, my name is Sarah Bigney McCabe, I live in Skowhegan, and I am here on behalf of the Maine AFL-CIO to testify in support of LD 1955.

I am here before you today wearing two hats, one as a representative of the over 40,000 members of the 200 affiliated local unions of the Maine AFL-CIO, and the other as a mom of a three-year-old named Sam.

Your committee is well versed in this topic. You have heard testimony from parents, providers, and employers alike who are all living the child care crisis every day. I mean really, by this point, I'm sure many of you probably can recite my personal story by heart because I have shared it here several times.

The lack of affordable and accessible child care is a huge problem for Maine working families. Whenever we bring up the issue of child care at a union meeting or event, people start nodding. If they aren't affected by it personally, they have family, friends, and co-workers who are struggling to find and afford child care.

I have collected comments from our members, who are nurses, fire fighters, teachers, people who work at the shipyard and in dozens of other sectors who are in the same boat. Workers are living paycheck to paycheck simply to pay for child care so they can afford to go to work. Parents are leaving the workforce altogether. Families are deciding not to have more children because they know they cannot find or afford child care.

As I've shared before, I saw this first hand when I had Sam. Before he was born we got on waiting lists for child care, and it wasn't until he was 15 months old that we got a spot. I had no other choice but to cut back at work to part time, and I literally don't know what I would have done if we hadn't had grandparents nearby to watch Sam so I could work a few a week. It was stressful not knowing when we would get a spot.

We absolutely love Sam's child care provider, Delores, or "D" as the kids call her. She is loving, patient, and cares deeply for the children she takes care of. She has become part of our extended family. She does so much for the families of the children she cares for. We as a state need to make sure it is financially feasible for Delores and all the child care providers like her to stay in business.

The great news is, the work you did last year in the 131<sup>st</sup> Legislature made real progress on this critical issue. By funding the child care employment award and wage supplements, you made progress on keeping dedicated workers in their jobs and keeping the doors of child care centers open. Over time this will mean more spots, shorter waiting lists, and more options for parents who want to work and need care for their children.

And by increasing the income threshold for families to qualify for the Child Care Affordability Program (CCAP) from 85% to 125% of median income, you helped many more families who were struggling to pay for child care breathe a little easier. Far too often, working families are in the position of making just too much to qualify for any help, but too little to pay for necessities. This understandably can lead to resentment, and a feeling that government isn't designed to help working class families. By raising the income threshold of CCAP to 125% of median income, you are giving hard working families a little help with a huge household expense. We commend you for this progress and we would strongly oppose any efforts to roll back the CCAP income threshold.

We all depend on nurses, fire fighters, teachers, and other essential workers to be able to go to work every day. If they do not have child care, or can't afford it, they can't go do their jobs. We all lose.

But we can't stop yet. The progress made in the 131<sup>st</sup> was incredibly positive, but more must be done to alleviate the crisis. There's currently a wait list for the CCAP, and LD 1955 would provide the funding needed to support these families who qualify but are waiting for help.

There are other good solutions before you today in the form of bills sponsored by Senator Reny and Senator Ingwersen, and we certainly support a multi-faceted approach to tackling this important and complex issue.

You may be thinking, this sounds great, but how will we pay for it? Here in Maine, the wealthiest 1% pay a smaller percentage of their income in state and local taxes than the middle class. Asking wealthy individuals and large corporations to pay their share is responsible and fair. Generating revenue through tax fairness can pay for programs like child care that are essential to our collective infrastructure.

Thank you.