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President of the Senate

THE MAINE SENATE
132nd Legislature

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**Testimony of Senate President Mattie Daughtry in support of
LD 1955, "An Act to Increase Child Care Affordability and Early Childhood Educator
Stability"**

**Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
May 15, 2025**

Good morning, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and Esteemed Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Mattie Daughtry. I serve as President of the Maine Senate and proudly represent Senate District 23, including Brunswick, Freeport, Harpswell, Pownal, Chebeague Island, and part of Yarmouth. I am honored to present LD 1955, "An Act to Increase Child Care Affordability and Early Childhood Educator Stability." I am presenting this bill *with and for* the child care workforce and the families who depend on these incredible professionals.

Personally, I am dedicated to initiatives that make Maine a better place to live, work, and where families can thrive. That's why I am so committed to supporting the child care workforce and families who rely on care. I am a firm believer that when you listen to the industry, you can put forward solutions that will improve outcomes.

Here in Maine, the cost of child care is one of the biggest hurdles for working families. As legislators, we hear from constituents that the cost of child care can feel like a heavy weight. With costs rising, many families are paying as much for child care as they do for their mortgages or rent. At the same time, we know that child care makes it possible for families to stay in or return to the workforce, bolstering working-class families across the state and growing our economy. Maine's child care educators are the workforce behind our workforce. Ask your local Chamber of Commerce and they will name child care in their list of what we can do to make Maine a better place to do business.

This is not just a financial issue—it's a moral issue. Families should not have to choose between the financial security of their families and the well-being of their children. We can do better and we must. Over the last five years, the Legislature has identified key ways to support the child care workforce and Maine families and we are learning these efforts are helping. My bill builds on three existing and successful Maine-made programs that are working for Maine families and the workforce:

1. **The Salary Sustainability Program** formerly called the Early Childhood Educator Workforce Salary Supplement, this provides monthly support for child care educators in a tiered way that promotes experience and education
2. **The Child Care Affordability Program** which helps eligible Maine families pay for child care

3. **The Child Care Employment Award**, a pilot program that provides financial awards to eligible Maine child care employees to enroll their own children in free child care — providing a key workplace benefit and helping recruitment and retention in the child care workforce.

My bill aims to make slight changes to our law to make improvements to make these programs both stronger and more effective:

1. **First, through Career and Technical Education Pathways** to ensure Career & Technical Education Early Childhood Educator instruction is available in all regions of the state (*Cost: \$0*)
2. **Second, to keep up the good work with available scholarships and apprenticeships** for child care educators working in licensed programs, building on Maine's robust programs that are available now and working (*Cost: \$0*)
3. **Third, updating the Salary Sustainability Program** by renaming the Early Childhood Educator Workforce Salary Supplement to the **The Salary Sustainability Program for Child Care Professionals** to better reflect its purpose—clarifying that the payments are not bonuses, but essential investment intended to help make early educators' wages more sustainable and reflective of their vital work. It also provides funding to the program with the goal that monthly payments do not decrease in July when payment ranges are calculated. (*Investment: \$1 million/biennium*)
4. **Fourth, for the Child Care Affordability Program:** the bill proposes adding accountability by requiring the Department to share a sustainability plan with the Legislature and makes an investment in families who qualify to clear the waitlist. This popular program needs an infusion of immediate support to clear the existing waitlists. We are also strongly recommending not letting these funds lapse into the general fund. These investments the Legislature has committed to are important, and we've made major strides over the last few years to support families, however, just because our fiscal year doesn't align perfectly for when families start child care doesn't mean the Dept shouldn't be able to plan to use the entire investment. (*Investment: \$2 million/biennium and \$3.8 million one-time funding, taking an idea from Senator Ingwersen's bill to clear the waitlist.*)
5. **Child Care Employment Award:** Continues a successful pilot making child care workers eligible for free tuition for their own children. (*Cost: \$0 this biennium*)

This bill will alleviate the significant ongoing pressure that has been placed on our state childcare workers and families who rely on child care, allowing Maine to clear the existing 600+ child waitlist and support more families who work in child care.

Fighting for child care workers and working families is a bipartisan issue, because it benefits all Mainers. This bill is supported by a group of bipartisan cosponsors from Fort Kent to Calais to Kittery; LD 1995 will make a tangible difference in getting families, especially those working in child care, access to the child care that they need. I want to thank all the bill's cosponsors.

I look forward to a robust discussion on how this bill can help Maine families and especially child care workers access the child care they need. I welcome any questions from the committee on this bill. As I mentioned, I have been working directly with the early educator community on this bill; testifying in support will be members of the Right from the Start Coalition who will be able to answer any questions I may not be able to.