



Testimony of Rita Furlow, Senior Policy Analyst
Maine Children's Alliance
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
LD 98
An Act To Clarify Maine's Statutes Related to the Licensing of Child Care Providers
February 25, 2021

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer and esteemed members of the Health and Human Services Committee, my name is Rita Furlow. I am the Senior Policy Analyst at the Maine Children's Alliance. I am here today in support of LD 98, *An Act To Clarify Maine's Statutes Related to the Licensing of Child Care Providers*. The Maine Children's Alliance is a statewide non-partisan, non-profit research and advocacy organization whose mission is to promote sound public policies to improve the lives of children, youth, and families in Maine.

At the Maine Children's Alliance, we believe that Maine's future prosperity depends upon how our children are doing today. We know from research on developmental science of the critical importance of the first five years of brain development.¹ This period is crucial in establishing the neural functions and connections that shape future cognitive, social, emotional, and health outcomes. There is clear evidence from neuroscience that demonstrates the importance of what is called "serve-and-return" interactions.² These interactions help build child-adult relationships that are responsive and attentive and ultimately build a strong foundation in a child's brain for all future learning and development.

Changes in our economy have resulted in increasing pressures on Maine families. With over 70 percent of Maine children under the age of six having both parents working to make ends meet, families need high quality early care and education to help them care for their children.³ A high quality system of child care that meets the needs of children and families is essential to not only the healthy development of young children but to the Maine economy.

¹ National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2004). *Children's Emotional Development Is Built into the Architecture of Their Brains: Working Paper No. 2*. Retrieved from: <https://46y5eh11fhgw3ve3ytpwxt9r-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2004/04/Childrens-Emotional-Development-Is-Built-into-the-Architecture-of-Their-Brains.pdf>

² National Scientific Council on the Developing Child. (2004). *Young children develop in an environment of relationships*. Working Paper No. 1. Retrieved from: <https://46y5eh11fhgw3ve3ytpwxt9r-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2004/04/Young-Children-Develop-in-an-Environment-of-Relationships.pdf>

³ The Annie E. Casey Foundation, KIDS COUNT Data Center, Children under age 6 with all available parents in work force (5-yr averages) in Maine, retrieved from: <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/7317-children-under-age-6-with-all-available-parents-in-work-force-5-yr-averages?loc=21&loct=2#detailed/2/any/false/1729,37,871,870,573,869,36,868,867,133/any/14380,14381>

Primary to all early childhood programming is our children's health and safety. The most significant source of funding to support child care in the United States is provided as a result of the Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG). The block grant delivers funding to the states to provide income eligible families with financial assistance for child care while also supporting the health and safety of child care for all children through licensing. The reauthorization of the Child Care Development Block Grant in 2014, the first reauthorization in 18 years, brought significant changes to child care across the country. This update to the law, which received strong bipartisan support, resulted in the need for states to improve licensing and monitoring of child care.

We support the federal and state efforts to improve the health and safety of children while they are in care. We have found these measures to be centered around the best interests of the child. We believe it is critical for Maine to come into full compliance with a federal law that has been on the books since 2014. We should not risk the loss of \$800,000 in penalties from the Child Care Development Block Grant when many Maine families need assistance paying for child care.

A high-quality system of early care and education that meets the needs of children and families is essential to not only the healthy development of young children but to the Maine economy. The adoption of these changes will keep Maine moving forward on the road to providing more children with high quality care.

Thank you for your consideration.