



Testimony of the Maine Association for the Education of Young Children (MaineAEYC),

for the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services in support of

L.D. 533 “An Act To Expand the Statewide Voluntary Early Childhood Consultation Program”

April 2, 2021

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Health and Human Services Committee, the Maine Association for the Education of Young Children (MaineAEYC) is writing to you in support of LD 533 and the expansion of Maine’s voluntary early childhood mental health consultation program. MaineAEYC continues to strongly support the implementation of a statewide voluntary early childhood consultation program to provide support and guidance to educators working in public preschools, child care centers, family child care settings and Head Start programs.

To illustrate the benefit of mental health consultation, we will share a statement with you from Anne Adams, former Associate Director of the Bowdoin College Children’s Center and past President of the MaineAEYC Board that we brought to the Education Committee when Maine was exploring the first implementation of this program.

Bowdoin College Children's Center has been practicing a continuity of care model for the past several years. We have educators staying with their primary children from when they enter the program as infants through three years old. Then our preschool children stay with the same educators for two years. Brain research, as well as studies on social emotional development of young children, indicate that having as few primary caregivers as possible and consistency of care is most beneficial to their cognitive growth. It is also understood that stress caused by the numerous transitions of care givers in the first years of life can have detrimental effects on development.

The benefits of continuity for children are huge; relationships are strong, care is consistent, parents are partners and children as they move through a child care program. When serving children with special needs, children with challenging behaviors or young families who are struggling, teachers are able to work through it with the child, stick with them and build an even stronger relationship for years and years. This is not easy work and we have found it to be work that requires professional help.

We have had a contracted mental health consultant and have found it to make all the difference. Where teachers would have been burnt out, they are digging deeper into their practice. Where children would have been abandoned because of their behavior, they are receiving loving care from a primary educator. Where parents would have been asked to leave a program, we are inviting them in to spend more time with us. Parents don't feel blamed, teachers feel supported and the child is getting what they actually need, a strong attachment in their first years of life.

MaineAEYC believes that a child's need for a strong social emotional foundation in the first years of life is paramount. Children will not be able to learn at their full potential until that happens. By expanding early childhood consultation, we can lessen early childhood expulsion, support and retain teachers, and improve the care and education of Maine’s children.