

Testimony of Lori Moses,
Before the Health and Human Services Committee, in favor of
LD 1712: *An Act To Support Children's Healthy Development and School Success*
May 20, 2021

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and esteemed members of the Health and Human Services Committee, my name is Lori Moses and I am the Executive Director of Catherine Morrill Day Nursery, a nationally accredited childcare center in Portland serving infants, toddlers & preschoolers including an on-site public pre-k partnership classroom with Portland Public Schools. I am speaking today in support of LD 1712: An Act to Support Children's Healthy Development and School Success.

Supporting a child care system makes good business sense and is vital for Maine's economic survival. Maine's working parents are struggling to find and pay for quality child care and our qualified early educator workforce is shrinking. I have never had a tougher time hiring teachers who have at least an Associates Degree in early childhood education, which is one of the accreditation standards. The result is not good for our young children, who may spend their formative, brain development years in inadequate situations. There are several longitudinal studies that prove that children enrolled in quality programs yield better societal outcomes than children who have been in mediocre or inferior quality programs. The key to success is that these quality program offer comprehensive services. This bill is modeled after a very successful early head start/childcare partnership, which has components such as developmental screening, family and community outreach and child physical and mental health.

As you know, Maine is at a point where there are more deaths than births and many industries are struggling to find workers. Many childcare programs can't enroll new children because they can't find and keep staff and the pandemic only made things worse. The lack of a workforce affects all industries and is exacerbated because two-thirds of Maine children under age 6 have all parents participating in the workforce. Without a solid childcare system, the lack of skilled workers will continue to be a challenge for us to meet the demands of the 21st century jobs. We need every child to reach his or her potential so that they can stay and work in Maine. Having a top notch childcare system can assist to this end. LD 1712 takes a community-based approach to improving access to quality early care and education. It addresses the needs of families, children and early educators, resulting in a stronger economy now and in the future. LD1712 is designed to support state coordination and local solutions that will ensure success.

Perhaps you remember Maine Public Radio's "Deep Dive" series into childcare in 2019. What stuck out for me was the couple who moved to Maine from the west coast. For over a year, they struggled to find childcare that they were comfortable with, which kept the mom out of the workforce. She said that if she had known beforehand how difficult it would be to find childcare in Maine, she wouldn't have moved here in the first place. This is not the message that we want to get out if we are to attract young people to live and work in Maine. Our prosperity depends on it.

In closing, I want to make sure that you understand that we must look at this entire age group of children from birth to age five, not just the 4 year olds through Public Pre-K expansion efforts. School readiness begins at birth. Please make Maine's children and families a priority, not only in words but in deeds, by voting to support LD 1712, and help to create an infrastructure that supports all of our families, the early care and education workforce, and Maine's children. Our children and families are counting on us. We are counting on you.

Thank you for your time today.

Lori Moses, Executive Director
Catherine Morrill Day Nursery
96 Danforth St. Portland, ME 04101
207-874-1115
catherinemorrill.director@gmail.com