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Testimony of Deborah Arcaro, Before the Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement, and Business Committee, in support of LD 1652: An Act To Build a Child Care System by Recruiting and Retaining Maine's Early Childhood Educators Workforce

May 10, 2021

Senator Curry, Representative Roberts, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement, and Business, my name is Deborah Arcaro. As a small business owner of a licensed family child care for 33 years, I am in favor of LD 1652.

Is LD 1652 a perfect bill, no. Is it going to solve the complex issue of a sustainable, quality child care system that is affordable for all? No. However, we need to stop talking about this issue and start to take action. Maine's child care workforce has been declining for a number of years and the pandemic clearly has highlighted that when parents of young children can't go to work, it impacts employers, our communities, and our economy. If we are serious about expanding access to high quality child care for all of Maine's children, we must focus on the child care workforce. A strong and stable child care workforce is the foundation of a strong and stable child care system. I feel that LD 1652 is both a strong step forward and doable.

The lack of a stable child care workforce is not a new issue or just the result of covid. As small business owners family child care providers face many of the issues other small businesses do. One of these is that like many of the professional trades we face an aging of the profession. We need to support younger workers so they both learn about and enter the profession. LD 1652 acknowledges the importance of CTE programs. There is real value there for recruitment of the future child care workforce.

Recruiting a diverse, skilled workforce in child care means barriers to accessing training and education pathways must be reduced. This is especially true for immigrants and those new to the workforce. I am also a huge believer that the diversity of the child care workforce will be best supported if multiple pathways with the goal of strengthening the child care workforce pool are created. Training and educational opportunities must be flexible. Coordinating among the variety of educational settings available in Maine today allows for greater access in educational attainment and skill development, as well as reduces redundancy in training.

While LD 1652 has a lot of financial support for higher education, it also establishes a system of salary supplements for the child care workforce that is working with children up to 5 years of age recognizing professional credentials, work experience and educational training history. There are multiple reasons that family child care providers make the choice to earn an ece degree or not to. For myself I have a Bachelor's in Elementary Education, a Master's in Special Education, and hold a current Maine teacher certification. I have no interest in earning an ece degree. I worked 10 years in a public school classroom prior to starting my family child care in 1988. I am a level 8 on the MRTQ Registry, a Step 3 on Quality for ME, have 222 hrs of CDA/ Core Knowledge training, have 439 hrs of recognized elective training, and 33 hrs of recognized ECE college course work. I value that it appears that continually earned professional development hours, Maine credentials and years of operating a sustainable small business will be recognized and counted as part of salary supplements in LD 1652. Even with a sustainable small business, providers continually struggle to juggle the needs of families to have affordable care and providing financially for our own family.

Maine's children and families need a strong, sustainable early care and education system. Without early care and education programs, parents cannot work. Without workers, our state and local economies suffer. Maine needs effective strategies to recruit and retain its child care workforce. I believe that the economic impact of

investing in the child care workforce would be far reaching. Maine needs to move beyond the discussion and begin to take action. I believe LD 1652 is a positive step in that direction and I ask for your consideration in supporting it.

I thank you for you time and attention.