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**Testimony of Ann Danforth, Maine Equal Justice, *in support of* LD 1652 “An Act To Build a Child Care System by Recruiting and Retaining Maine’s Early Childhood Educators Workforce”**

May 11, 2021

Good morning Senator Curry, Representative Roberts, and members of the Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business. My name is Ann Danforth, and I am a Policy Advocate at Maine Equal Justice. We are a civil legal services organization, and we work with and for people with low income seeking solutions to poverty through policy, education, and legal representation. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of LD 1652.

**What LD 1652 Does**

LD 1652 creates and incentivizes career pathways for early child care and education practitioners working with children up to age 5. It does this in a variety of ways, including salary supplements for early care and education workers, scholarships for workers to pursue education and training programs, enhancements to the early care and education training programs offered through career and technical education centers, the expansion of apprenticeships available in child care, and support for immigrants and other populations lacking experience in Maine’s workforce to succeed in this field.

**Why Maine Equal Justice Supports LD 1652**

Even before the pandemic, a shortage of quality, affordable child care and early education was one of the most common barriers to finding and keeping a job for parents with low income. Close to 70% of Maine children under the age of six live in households in which all parents are working.<sup>1</sup> We know that if these parents don’t have access to child care, they can’t go to work. In addition to the shortage of supply, parents face the significant barrier of affordability. Without support, in Maine, single parents pay 55.9% of their income for center-based infant child care. The price of center-based child care for two children would cost married couple families living at or below the federal poverty level over 100% of annual household income.<sup>2</sup> The implications of this are important for child development, for families’ economic well-being, and for our economy.

In 2017 and 2018, Maine Equal Justice worked in partnership with a diverse set of stakeholders to identify the primary contributing factors of poverty, and to identify potential solutions. The initiative,

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<sup>1</sup> <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/5057-children-under-age-6-with-all-available-parents-in-the-labor-force?loc=1&loct=1#detailed/2/21/false/1729,37,871,870,573,869,36,868,867,133/any/11472,11473>

<sup>2</sup> [https://info.childcareaware.org/hubfs/2019%20Price%20of%20Care%20State%20Sheets/Maine.pdf?utm\\_campaign=2019%20Cost%20of%20Care&utm\\_source=2019%20COC%20-%20ME](https://info.childcareaware.org/hubfs/2019%20Price%20of%20Care%20State%20Sheets/Maine.pdf?utm_campaign=2019%20Cost%20of%20Care&utm_source=2019%20COC%20-%20ME)

which is ongoing, is called Invest in Tomorrow. After holding child poverty forums in various parts of the state experiencing higher levels of poverty, including in Androscoggin, Aroostook, Piscataquis and Washington counties, we conducted follow-up meetings, interviews with stakeholders statewide, and conducted an online survey with over 180 respondents. From this, we identified the need for more quality and affordable child care and early education as a primary focus for the initiative. At Maine Equal Justice, this learning reinforced what we have been hearing from clients for years: a lack of affordable child care is a major barrier to financial stability. Our experience with the Invest in Tomorrow initiative was a powerful reinforcement of that reality.

Through Invest in Tomorrow stakeholder interviews, we learned that one of the main reasons for the shortage of quality care is that it is hard to attract well-trained workers unless you're able to pay higher salaries, and paying higher salaries means higher costs for families who are already struggling to afford child care at current rates. We support this bill because it is thoughtfully designed to address these problems at once: the shortage of supply and the difficulty in finding quality care and education for families. In addition, it provides higher wages for workers doing vitally important work in our communities, some of whom are making poverty-level wages.

These findings are also in line with the state's 10 Year Economic Development Plan and supported by recommendations from the Governor's Economic Recovery Committee. Both prioritize creating a high-quality, accessible, and affordable early care and education system; recognize the need to develop talent among people currently left out of the workforce; and highlight the need to build the infrastructure needed to attract and support workers to participate in the economy. By creating more pathways to sustainable jobs in the field and by building a stronger child care system for the benefit of both parents and children, LD 1652 supports the goals laid out in these plans. As our state recovers from the pandemic, affordable child care will be badly needed in order for Maine parents to return to work as more businesses open and need workers. At the same time, many Mainers will be looking for supports, training, and retraining opportunities in our post-pandemic economy.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, we support LD 1652 because it advances the goals of Invest in Tomorrow by helping to ensure parents and caregivers have access to quality, affordable child care and early learning so they can sustain employment while providing their children with the support and learning necessary for healthy development.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of this bill. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.