

Testimony of Martha Eshoo
Member of MaineAEYC
Before the Committee in Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business
in support of

L.D. 1652 “An Act to Attract, Build, and Retain an Early Childhood Education Workforce through Increased Training, Education and Career Pathways”

May 12, 2021

House Speaker Ryan Fecteau and distinguished members of the Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business, my name is Martha Eshoo and I'm a center-based director working with infants, toddlers, and preschool aged children in Brunswick at Bowdoin College Children's Center. I strongly support this proposal to develop career pathways for early educators, including professional supports, and a focus on compensation.

Professional early childhood educators commit themselves and their careers to a field that is underpaid (53% of early childhood educators in Maine rely on public benefits), under recognized, and overwhelmingly in demand (73% of children in Maine have both parents working). Families looking for care for their children in Maine find that group care is expensive, quality care (as defined by NAEYC accreditation standards and MRTQ) is difficult to find, and spaces for infant care are slim.

Our State's employers are generally not taking financial responsibility for supporting the work force that they employ either in wages that will afford their employees good quality care or supporting the childcare industry. Therefore, many of us witness a difficult situation as we watch children grow up in care facilities that are staffed with educators earning minimum wage, not educated in the care and development of young children, without health benefits, and very often looking for affordable childcare themselves. This creates a revolving door where retention is nearly impossible, turnover is nearly 60% annually, and the staff who are hired into vacated positions are less qualified than their predecessors. We need to change this in order for Maine to attract young families, support young children's growth, and stabilize the early childhood education field.

L.D. 1584 is critical because it impacts both the children's lives directly and the professional careers of childcare providers. This profession suffers from cultural assumptions that bounce between “anyone can do this work” and “I wouldn't work with children”. This leaves those of us who passionately, intentionally, and determinedly work with children struggling to bring a sense of professional identity to a field that is undervalued. With training, education, and a sense of career trajectory, young professional staff, many already with degrees, would join a field that speaks to their interests and offers them a future.

At this time, we see we have a long way to go when we read that to be qualified for a top teaching position in a child care program in the State of Maine these are currently the requirements:

Head Teacher --13 - 24 children: Must be at least 21 with a high school diploma or equivalent **and** have 12 mos. employment in licensed child day care facility for 13 or more children; **or** 12 mos. experience as an operator of a program for 3 - 12 children (including as a family day care provider) **and** have 6 hours training in childcare or early childhood education topics. (Maine Licensing Regulations)

And then we read an on-line search where the recommendations for a Certified Professional Animal Care Manager include these qualifications:

- High school diploma or the equivalent
- A minimum of two years or 4,000 hours working in animal care

Body of Knowledge Represented by CPACP Credentials (similar in content to child development: temperament, behavior, development, and management)

The in-depth, 150-question CPACM exam, conducted at an approved testing location for a total testing time of 2.5 hours, covers animal care topics including health issues such as administering medications, first aid and CPR, and cleaning and disinfecting.

The juxtaposition of these two positions offers us as a society a lot to consider about what contributes to a quality child care work force however, in the context of this testimony it raises two critical points.

1. Young aspiring professionals yearn for work that requires effort, reflects value, and deepens with commitment when they look to childcare. To date, childcare is not an obvious choice.
2. Professionals will commit to a field where they join in their work with a team of other trained professionals who are equally dedicated to their work, their practice, and their continued education. This sense of shared work, caring for children with others who understand the importance of the job, and supporting families is meaningful and important to childcare providers. When childcare providers work with others who are as dedicated, committed to education, and passionate about the field they create a solid workforce. This is what Maine needs.

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. Since the teachers in childcare programs are a critical part of the system, we need effective strategies to recruit and retain early childhood educators. LD1584 will grow our early childhood workforce supporting Maine's future prosperity.