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Testimony of Sarah Farrell
before the Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business
in support of

**L.D. 1652: An Act To Build a Child Care System by Recruiting and Retaining
Maine's Early Childhood Educators Workforce**

May 11, 2021

Senator Curry, Representative Roberts, and distinguished members of the Committee On Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business, my name is Sarah Farrell and I'm the Director of Child Care at the CLC YMCA in Damariscotta. I strongly support this proposal to develop career pathways for early educators, which includes increasing access to affordable professional advancement opportunities and a focus on fair compensation.

Finding qualified staff is very difficult. We are often short staffed and retaining staff is difficult due to the low pay. Many staff face a conundrum because education is expensive and furthering your education within the Early Education path does not necessarily pay off. Also, most staff are spread thin with family, job and other time commitments. Due to the many unemployment incentives given during the pandemic, it was more lucrative to stay home on unemployment than come work a low paying job. Unfortunately, our society does not value the care we give to young children and the values we work to instill in them. Staffing can become such a challenge that we cannot open programs causing an economic catastrophe within the community. The state needs to work to highlight the successes that come when families and Child Care workers are fully supported.

Ensuring that all young children have an equal opportunity for healthy growth and development is a long-term investment in Maine's future prosperity. 90% of a child's brain develops as early as five years old, and positive early learning experiences establish strong foundations for the brain's architecture. Early educators play an important role in young children's learning and development. They help set the foundation for children's future success.

Collectively, the YMCA is the largest early care and education provider in Maine. We serve more than 1,500 children at 59 childcare sites across the state. We stand in agreement with our partners in the field, including MaineAEYC, the Family Child Care Association of Maine, the Maine Head Start Directors' Association, and the Right from the Start Coalition, in support of L.D. 1652. With smart investments in our early education system such as this, we can increase Maine families' access to high quality and affordable care and help children reach their full potential.

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