



STATE OF MAINE
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
SPEAKER'S OFFICE
AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333-0002
(207) 287-1300

RYAN M. FECTEAU
SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE

**Testimony of Speaker Ryan Fecteau
In Support of L.D. 1652
“An Act to Build a Child Care System By Recruiting and Retaining
Maine’s Early Childhood Educators Workforce”
Tuesday, May 11, 2021**

Senator Curry, Representative Roberts, honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Innovation, Economic Development and Business, I am Ryan Fecteau and I represent part of my hometown of Biddeford. I also have the distinct honor of serving as the Speaker of the Maine House. I’m here today to present L.D. 1652, *An Act to Build a Child Care System By Recruiting and Retaining Maine’s Early Childhood Educators Workforce*. This bill invests in our early childhood educators — the workforce behind the workforce — allowing parents to go to work with the peace of mind that their children are being cared for by highly skilled and trained professionals.

In Maine, we’re facing twin crises in childcare: parents can’t find affordable child care, and child care providers can’t afford to stay in the industry. Child care providers and early educators who are experienced and passionate about educating young children struggle to stay in this field, knowing they could make more money at Starbucks.

Simply put, early childhood educators are the lowest paid workers in the education field. Not surprisingly, turnover rates are high; this leads to less continuity and lower quality care for our children. Maine’s child care workers earn only 50% of the living wage for an adult with a child, with many relying on government assistance to meet their most basic needs.

Salary supplements for child care teachers would not bring parity with teachers in the public school system, but it would help to incentivize further education and retain teachers in the field. Without an ability to attract and retain educators, Maine’s early care and education system will have difficulty serving our children. The early childhood educator workforce is fragile, and in some areas, it’s already failing. But it is not too late for Maine to make critical changes that will put us on a path to save this sector.

We know that child care providers need to be paid more, and we know we can’t balance the books on the backs of working families who simply can’t afford to pay any more for child care. That’s where L.D. 1652 comes in: this bill bridges the gap between what is affordable for parents with what is sustainable for the workforce.

The true cost of providing high-quality child care — with adequate compensation for extremely hard working teachers — is far higher than what working families can afford. Raising parents’ child care fees to pay educators more is not a workable solution. Increased public investment is needed to raise compensation and give all Maine children with working parents an opportunity to access high quality early education and ensure their kids are prepared for Kindergarten. States are recognizing that salary supplement programs are a step forward in addressing the disparity and inequities in our child care system.

Just as we invest in roads and bridges, prioritizing investments in child care infrastructure will promote economic growth. Before parents can engage in economic activity, they need reliable, affordable, and safe child care. Building a child care infrastructure includes preparing and compensating the early childhood workforce to expand the number of qualified early educators.

L.D. 1652 will ensure that we prioritize ongoing investment in apprenticeships, scholarships, and salary support to help Maine recruit and retain early educators. We will not only build quality and capacity in our child care system, but also help to promote diversity in the profession. When we improve compensation, education, and training, our commitment to early childhood educators will positively influence Maine's future citizenry, workforce, and leadership.

I have been watching the national conversation around child care, seeing states realizing the importance of investing in this sector as though it were infrastructure. Maine has set goals to invest in this sector, as evident in the Ten Year Economic Development Plan. And just this week, the Maine Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS) at the Department of Health and Human Services is readying plans to deploy \$28 million in ARPA federal funds to support wage supplements over the next two years. I commend the OCFS' plans to dedicate funds over two years for salary supplements, which will result in an estimated \$100 monthly salary supplement for every child care provider in the state. L.D. 1652, with the amendment I am introducing today, will ensure that wage supports continue after these two years, with a \$4.5 million investment from the General Fund beginning in FY 2024.

Outside one-time money from the federal government, I believe a sustained investment from our state is crucial to maintaining and building on the gains in recruitment and retention when the ARPA funding lapses in fiscal year 2024. The \$4.5 million in this bill will be targeted to incentivize providers to attain credentials and degrees, rewarding Maine's child care workforce who are investing in their own education and professional development, and through scholarships, we can help them graduate without student debt so that early childhood education is a step on a career ladder of meaningful work with Maine's children.

The amended version of the bill also removes the provision that funds early childhood education programming at CTE schools. Governor Mills' Administration has dedicated \$20 million for CTE schools through ARP funding that will help Maine bolster early childhood education programs at our CTE schools.

One last note: the experiences children have in their first years of life are very important, because the cognitive, emotional, and social skills children develop in their earliest years lay the groundwork for future success. When parents are working, it is critical that infants, toddlers, and preschoolers have access to the best possible care and education. In effective early care and education programs, it's the early childhood professionals who are essential to children's learning. Early childhood educators influence young children's development through their daily interactions and the environment, routines, and experiences that they plan for and provide. This is why it is so important for the child care workforce to have the knowledge and skills necessary to work with young children *and* the support they need to provide quality care and education.

One of the most important things our state can do to improve outcomes for children and their families is to make significant and sustained investments in high-quality early childhood education. And because the teachers and staff are at the core of quality, investing specifically in them is the best way to support our child care system. I urge you to join me in supporting L.D. 1652.