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Testimony of Tracye Fortin
On behalf of Educare Central Maine
Before the Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement
and Business, in support of L.D. 1652;
An Act to Build a Childcare System by Recruiting and Retaining
Maine's Early Childhood Education Workforce
May 11, 2021

Senator Chip Curry, Representative Tiffany Roberts, and distinguished members of the Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business, my name is Tracye Fortin, Executive Director of Educare Central Maine, and I am speaking with you today on behalf of Educare Central Maine to express support for L.D. 1652; *An Act to Build a Childcare System by Recruiting and Retaining Maine's Early Childhood Educator's Workforce.*

Educare Central Maine is a model early childhood program that prides itself on hiring, training, and retaining early childhood educators to deliver high quality, comprehensive services to children, including strategies to promote effective family education and engagement. Our public/private partnerships include our local Community Action Program Head Start and the Waterville public school.

We blend and braid funding to support enrolling children with the greatest needs; economic, or health, mental health or disabilities. We support families in addressing a myriad of barriers and their pathway out of poverty. The benefit of partnership strengthens continuity of service and care, supporting children, families, and the program, especially for the at-risk population.

It is better recognized now, more than ever before, that childcare is a vital part of the infrastructure for a healthy economy. The workforce has been significantly adversely impacted by the lack of childcare across the county. In Maine, pre-pandemic, there was already a reduction in early educators in the workforce, with not enough childcare programs to meet the need of Maine families. The loss of educators this past year dipped numbers even further.

We know that infant and toddler care is the greatest care need. We know that early (infant/toddler) identification in Part C Child Development Services is low, missing many of our youngest children with special needs. We know from research the long-term impact of adverse childhood experiences. We know that brain development is greatest in the first three years of life.

The workforce is in need of hiring and the most eligible workers are women with young children. Leaving a child in the care of another is a difficult and emotion-packed decision. High quality educators provide a level of confidence for families when choosing to (re)enter the workforce. Continuity of care with a consistent educator supports attachment, promoting social-emotional well-being, as well as building upon children's educational learning. Low staff turnover is an important quality benchmark.

In order to attract and retain early childhood educators, it is imperative that they earn a salary that is commensurate with public school teachers. Specialized coursework in higher education and ongoing professional development, including infant-toddler development, deserves compensation equal to other Associate and Bachelor level education positions. Additionally, investing in pathways such as career and technical education centers and scholarships for higher education will draw future educators as well as support current educators to advance professionally. Recognition of the value of early educators will increase individuals entering the field.

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Correct File Attached