

The Joint Standing Committee on Innovation, Development,
Economic Advancement, and Business
Testimony from Jenny France, Early Childhood Education Instructor
Somerset Career and Technical Center, Skowhegan.

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, distinguished members of the IDEA Committee, my name is Jenny France. I am the Early Childhood Education Instructor at the Somerset Career and Technical Center in Skowhegan. I am also a previous Head Start teacher and center manager. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of L.D. 1652.

I entered the workforce as an early childhood professional in 1999. I had a bachelor’s degree, student loans, and two young children. As a Head Start teacher, I worked with some of our most at risk children and families. I taught their children. I home visited and supported families with parenting skills, education, and other family goals. But my wages were so low that I could have qualified for many of the assistance programs that I helped these families obtain. Ironically, I, as did many of my peers, worked a second job to pay for childcare.

I earned my master’s degree and was hired into my current teaching position in a public school district. Many others I had worked with also moved on to work for school districts or other jobs with higher pay. Not because they didn’t love their job, or feel fulfilled from working with children and families, but simply because they couldn’t afford to continue working for such low salaries. There has been little to no change in the past twenty-five years and early childhood professionals continue to leave positions where they are making positive impacts on the lives of children, for employment with higher wages and better benefits.

Now, at the Somerset Career and Technical Center, I teach students about early childhood development and professionalism. They are required to volunteer throughout our community in day care centers, elementary schools, and programs for children with disabilities. Students build connections with potential employers and many obtain employment in their volunteer placements. These collaborations benefit our local workforce, as my students come to them with required certifications such as CPR and Mandated Reporter and over 180 hours of experience working with children. Employers can vet students through the volunteer process, ensuring they are the right candidate for the position. It’s a win for both students and our local community.

However, enrollment in early childhood career and technical programs across the state has been declining in recent years. It is difficult to lure perspective students to a career path that does not offer wages comparable to other caring professions, such as public-school teacher, nursing, or counseling. Unfortunately, our early childhood workforce is losing talented potential candidates who want to work with young children. This is trend we can’t afford to continue.

Expanding career and technical early childhood programs that provide opportunities for students to volunteer in local settings will also expand pathways to employment for students and help fill desperately needed child care positions. But these aspiring professionals will also require a livable wage if we want to entice them into these programs and keep them working in the critical field of early childhood education.

Thank you for your time.

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60
61
62
63
64
65
66
67
68
69
70
71
72
73
74
75
76
77
78
79
80
81
82
83
84
85
86
87
88
89
90
91
92
93
94
95
96
97
98
99
100

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 child care 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.

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 child care 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.

Background about yourself, why you are speaking today

Why this is an urgent issue

Provide information the committee should consider

General Outline:

1. Statement of the problem with data indicating breadth, depth, reach. What are the implications for the problem continuing?
2. Further specifics: how does this impact schools/children/workers/economy?
3. How does this bill address the problem?
4. What will success look like if this is implemented? Are there considerations for rollout (e.g. modified versions of the bill that would do?)
5. Reinforce position and statement of support

Thank you for your consideration.

NAME

ORG/RESIDENCE