

Testimony in Support of LD 1652: An Act To Build a Child Care System by Recruiting and Retaining Maine's Early Childhood Educators Workforce

May 11, 2021

Senator Carry, Representative Roberts, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business, my name is Ninette Irabaruta, Director of Public Policy and Advocacy at United Way of Greater Portland (UWGP). I am here today on behalf of the United Ways in Maine in support of LD 1652, a bill that would build a child care system in Maine by recruiting and retaining early childhood educators for our workforce.

UWME supports LD 1652 because we believe that investment in a strong early childhood care system cannot be successful without an equally strong workforce to support it. Investing in both aspects of the child care system is vital to our state's future.

The child care workforce plays a critical role in communities by providing foundational education and skills development for children while simultaneously supporting working parents. **Early childhood educators are a critically important part of children's and workforce's future. This is not the case, however, in our state or our country.** In Maine, early childhood educators are extremely underpaid – with a median hourly pay of \$11.35 an hour, or \$24,030 a year, their income is well below the federal poverty rate of \$26,200.¹ Such low wages are a big reason why it is difficult to hire and retain early childhood educators in our state.

A robust early childhood workforce enables parents to work, attend school, or participate in other job training opportunities, and further, it enables parents to contribute to our economy. Yet, in many communities in our state, the demand for child care outweighs supply.

For instance, data spanning **2009 to 2019 compiled by the Maine Department of Health and Human Services show that nearly 40% of licensed family child cares centers stopped their operations. This was a huge problem for a state in which 5.5% of the population – 70,726 children – are under 5 years.** There are many factors that contribute to this shortage, including a lack of qualified and supported early care and education professionals.

We assume that all of you present today on this committee want to see Maine thriving both economically and socially, where every person – including parents, young children, and early child care educators – who live here can work towards thriving together. **UWs of Maine encourages the Maine Legislature to build a functional and successful early childhood care system that serves as a model for the rest of the nation.**

LD 1652 provides a detailed plan for how our state can have a successful early child care system by investing in its workforce, including expansion of educational programs, supports for persons taking classes to attain an early childhood education credential, and recruitment of diverse and skilled early childhood educators, among other efforts.

¹ [Bipartisan Policy Center](#).

We need to remember that every \$1 invested in quality child care will yield a 16% return on investment in future savings in education, health, economic productivity.² We can no longer ignore the urgency of providing quality education to our young children and their teachers because these children are not only our future workforce, but their parents are also our current workforce.

For these reasons we respectfully encourage you to support and pass LD 1652 – Maine’s children, their families, and the future of our state will benefit.

Thank you for your leadership and service.

² [PortlandWorksforKidsoverviewandadvocacyone-sheetv9_10_20.pdf \(portlandstartingstrong.org\)](#)