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Testimony of Tina Jennings
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 Tina Jennings and I'm the Association Director of Community & Youth Engagement at the YMCA of Auburn-Lewiston. 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.

The cost of higher education in the low-paying early education field is a challenge not only for our direct-care staff, but for our leadership team as well. Hiring and retaining staff that currently have degrees in this field is extremely difficult. We struggle to offer wages that will attract and retain qualified staff. We are seeing staff leave the field in search of higher pay. Childcare providers, as you may already know, are required by law to maintain certain staff-to-child ratios in the classroom to ensure safe and quality care. When we have a vacancy, it has a significant impact on our program staff and the families we serve. To avoid closing classrooms, oftentimes supervisors end up filling in in the classroom, which can lead to higher staff stress and burnout rates. Staff turnover also disrupts children's care. A great number of the children we serve experience significant upheaval in their personal lives. At the Auburn-Lewiston YMCA, we strive to build strong and lasting relationships with the children in our care to help them thrive. The professional supports outlined in this bill would help us attract and retain early education staff by providing them with a clear pathway and tools for their future, which in turn will strengthen the care for the youth we serve.

We know that the need for high quality childcare in the Auburn-Lewiston area is great; we often have a waitlist for our program. Early educators are helping develop the future leaders of Maine and our nation. The first five years is the most critical period in a child's development. The lessons learned in this time shape who the child will become, and the capacity they have for learning. We owe it to our state's children to have educated professionals paving the way. With smart investments in our early education system such as those outlined in L.D. 1652, we can increase Maine families' access to high quality and affordable care and help children reach their full potential.

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