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Testimony of Jen Johnson
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 Jen Johnson, and I'm the Preschool Director at the Waldo County YMCA. 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.

Though I would love to further my certifications by pursuing my Master's degree, the combination of family responsibilities and my full time Preschool teaching demands coupled with the expense of higher education costs makes it untenable at the present time.

As has always been the case, it's very difficult to attract quality applicants without offering a commensurate compensation package. This leads to high turnover, made all the more frustrating because the employee is often showing competence and skill when they decide to move on to more gainful employment; then, it's back to square one...

I believe that it's critical to establish a solid educational foundation, while nurturing each of my student's individual gifts. When this happens with strong support for (and from) the families, it creates a wonderful consistent pattern to thrive in their continuing education!

Ensuring that all young children have an equal opportunity for healthy growth and development is a long-term investment in Maine's future prosperity. 90% of a child's brain develops as early as five years old, and positive early learning experiences establish strong foundations for the brain's architecture. Early educators play an important role in young children's learning and development. We help set the foundation for all our children's future success.

Collectively, the YMCA is the largest early care and education provider in Maine. We serve more than 1,500 children at 59 childcare sites across the state. We stand in agreement with our partners in the field, including MaineAEYC, the Family Child Care Association of Maine, the Maine Head Start Directors' Association, and the Right from the Start Coalition, in support of L.D. 1652. With smart investments in our early education system such as this, we can increase Maine families' access to high quality and affordable care and help children reach their full potential.

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