



**TESTIMONY BY JASON JUDD, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, EDUCATE MAINE
AND MEMBER, READYNATION
BEFORE THE INNOVATION, DEVELOPMENT, ECONOMIC ADVANCEMENT
AND BUSINESS COMMITTEE
IN SUPPORT OF L.D. 1652 “AN ACT TO BUILD A CHILD CARE SYSTEM BY
RECRUITING AND RETAINING MAINE’S EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS
WORKFORCE”**

9:30 a.m. Tuesday May 11, 2021

Senator Curry, Representative Roberts, Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business, my name is Jason Judd and I am Executive Director of Educate Maine and a member of the business organization ReadyNation. Educate Maine is also a proud co-leader of the MaineSpark Coalition that is dedicated to achieving the state’s educational attainment goal that 60 percent of Maine adults have a credential of value by 2025.

I am pleased to testify in support of LD 1652, “An Act to Build a Child Care System by Recruiting and Retaining Maine’s Early Childhood Educators Workforce.”

This past year has made it undeniably clear how important child care is to the functioning of our economy. Parents have had to try to juggle child rearing and work simultaneously while businesses came face-to-face with the reality that, without reliable child care, parents can’t work. That makes addressing parents’ barriers to high-quality child care a priority issue for business leaders. As a business-led nonprofit, we’ve heard time and again from our networks that this is a major issue that needs to be addressed. As an employer of a number of staff with young children, I’ve also seen firsthand what it takes for parents to try to juggle work and childcare responsibilities when care is not consistently available. We have adapted, to be sure, but I stand before you today with newfound appreciation for what childcare providers offer that all too often goes unnoticed.

Let me be clear, I’m talking specifically about high-quality childcare. We all know how important child care is, but what’s less understood is what we mean by “quality” child care, why it matters so much, and the important foundational piece child care plays in the educational continuum for Maine children.

There are three key elements of child care quality. First, a program’s physical environment must be safe, clean and attractive to children. Classroom materials should stimulate physical, cognitive, social and emotional development and instruction and curriculum should be research-based. And, most importantly, the interpersonal interactions must be consistent, supportive and stimulate learning.

The heart of any early childhood care and education program is the relationship between the teacher and the child. Highly qualified early educators engage in nurturing interactions with children, supporting children's social and emotional development, and also provide developmentally-appropriate instruction in key pre-literacy, pre-math and other academic skills. This forms a foundation for successful learning in our K-12 education system, which benefits when early childhood educators are well trained and supported through continuous professional development. Adequate compensation is also key to attracting and retaining top talent.

To provide the level of care and attention needed to facilitate children's development, child-to-teacher ratios have to be low. Because the child care "day" can be as long as 12 hours (far longer than a public school day), there is also a pressing need to cover the entire day with adequate staff.

The main driver of child care costs is labor. Maine child care workers earn low salaries. The median wage for Maine [early educators](#) is [\\$12.89 per hour](#), which is about \$26,800 annually, compared to a [\\$55,000 median salary](#) for a Maine public school teacher. Compensation tends to be lowest in private, community-based settings, which serve a majority of children.

L.D. 1652 is designed to begin to address wages and training for Maine's child care workforce. As the Speaker outlined in his presentation of the bill, this proposal creates wage stipends tied to worker's knowledge, training, and experiences, and recognizes and rewards increased skills attainment. This proposal supports multiple pathways for skill development, training, and educational opportunities for early educators. These pathways include expanding early childhood programs at Career and Technical Education Centers, which is a great entry point for young people and a model that we know works to sets students up for success in their future post-secondary programs and in their workplaces.

Speaker Fecteau's bill also includes child care scholarships and apprenticeships. We hope these programs will be developed in such a way that they support the recruitment of diverse workers. We support child care workforce training and education opportunities that are flexible and transferable across our higher education, adult education, and professional development programs and should offer a wide range of professional development opportunities – from badging, to credentialing, to Associate, Bachelors' and Masters' degrees.

And the great news is that thanks to the most recent federal package of relief funding to Maine, which includes \$118 million specifically to support child care, Maine has the resources needed to begin to address the current child care workforce challenges and build a much stronger and more stable sector that is key to so many other economic sectors in Maine.

If every family were able to access the quality child care they need, regardless of where they lived in Maine, we could increase workforce participation across Maine and unleash the potential for true economic growth. We would also have more people choosing to move here specifically to work and raise their children. That's how important this investment is to children, families, the economy, and workforce attraction. Speaker Fecteau's bill is the beginning of a strategic, targeted investment in quality early care and education for Maine's youngest people will shore

up the foundation of our economy and pay dividends for years to come. I urge the Committee's unanimous support for this bill. Thank you for your consideration.