

TESTIMONY In Support of LD 1652:

“An Act to Build a Child Care System by Recruiting and Retaining Maine’s Early Childhood Educators Workforce”

Grace Leavitt, President, Maine Education Association

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Innovation, Development,
Economic Advancement and Business

May 11th, 2021

Senator Curry, Representative Roberts, and esteemed members of the Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business,

My name is Grace Leavitt. I am a Spanish teacher on leave from Greely High School while serving as President of the Maine Education Association. The MEA has nearly 24,000 members—faculty and staff in our pre-K-12 public schools, our institutions of higher education, and many dedicated retired educators.

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

Maine has been dealing with workforce shortages in many areas, and the pandemic has greatly increased these shortages and highlighted the need to address them. Likely the greatest area of need, the most critical area, is that of accessible, quality, affordable child care and early childhood education. This has impacted everyone—employees in all fields, including the teachers and staff in our pre-K-12 schools and on our campuses—and most of all, of course, it has impacted our children. If you have not personally had to deal with trying to find child care, then surely you have known others who have struggled with this. We have lost educators from the profession because they needed but could not locate child care for their own children, all of which only exacerbated the staffing shortages we are seeing in our schools. The lack of child care has increased the workforce shortages in all fields, as parents have had to choose to step back from their employment when the care is not available.

There is proposed federal legislation, the American Families Plan, which could go a long way toward helping to address this issue in part. But we obviously cannot wait for nor rely on this, given the unpredictable nature of actions in D.C.

Governor Mills recognizes the need for universal pre-K and has recently announced that she is dedicating millions of dollars of federal relief money to expanding pre-K programs. This is especially good news, as it helps to address the inequity of some students arriving in our kindergarten programs ready to learn and others who have not had the same opportunity and support in developing critical social and emotional skills. It will certainly help, but still, it is not enough for addressing the issue. Maine also needs to attract and retain quality educators for not only pre-K but also for child care programs.

LD 1652 addresses the issue of child care and early childhood education in Maine in a comprehensive way.

We urge your support of LD 1652.

Thank you for your time, and please contact me if you have any questions.

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