

Testimony of Sarah MacLaughlin

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 Educator Workforce”

May 11th, 2021

Senator Curry, Representative Roberts, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement, and Business, my name is Sarah MacLaughlin, and I am a licensed social worker, author, and parent educator. I live in Windham.

I had worked in child care for 10 years. I hold a bachelor’s degree and while I was passionate about my work in early childhood education, the low wages prevented me from remaining in the field long-term. I shifted gears so I could earn a living wage, have more flexibility in raising my own family, and achieve a higher level of professional status.

It is beyond unfair, given the research on the importance of the first five years of life, that early childhood educators receive less pay, benefits, and status than their counterparts who in some cases teach children just a year or two older. Early childhood caregivers and teachers are not just babysitters. The job requires a high level of skill—knowledge of child development, emotional intelligence, self-awareness, cooperation, and resilience.

We know that investment in our youngest citizens pays back high dividends (a 13% return on investment—see the [Heckman Equation](#)). Maine must invest in early childhood. Our children and families deserve a strong, sustainable early care and education system because without them, parents cannot work. When parents cannot work, our economy suffers. Maine’s early childhood educators are a critical part of the economic and educational systems and deserve a living wage. We need effective strategies to recruit and retain early childhood educators. LD1652 will grow our early childhood workforce, supporting Maine’s future prosperity.