



Maine Association for the Education of Young Children

Testimony of Heather Marden

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 Heather Marden and I am writing testimony on behalf of the Maine Association for the Education of Young Children (MaineAEYC) in support of LD 1652. MaineAEYC promotes high-quality early learning for all children, birth through age 8, by connecting practice, policy, and research. We support this proposal to develop career pathways for early educators, with scholarships for credentials and degrees and a focus on compensation, because high quality early care and education (ECE) is essential for children, families, and Maine’s prosperity.



We have about 64,500 children under age 5 in Maine.



The first years of a child’s life are the period of the most rapid brain development.



Children, their families, and our state benefit from early childhood education in ways that are immediate and long-lasting.



But the extent of the benefits they reap depends on the depth of the quality of their experiences and education.



And the depth of that quality depends on the strength of the early childhood educators providing it.



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Unmet Need for Early Care and Education in Maine and an ECE Workforce Shortage

While some families have chosen to keep young children home during COVID-19, we know that many families are looking for child care. They are on waiting lists. They are living in parts of the state where options are few. They are piecing together arrangements to try and have some reliable care for their young children so they can go to work. At the same time, our child care programs are struggling to find and keep qualified staff.

A few weeks ago, MaineAEYC conducted a survey reaching out licensed child care programs across Maine in partnership with the Family Child Care Association of Maine (FCCAM), Maine Head Start Directors Association (MHSDA), and the YMCA Alliance of Northern New England, to get a sampling of information from child care programs after one year in a pandemic. We found similar, yet even more urgent staffing issues compared to a survey we conducted in 2019. Directors of child care centers reported back high turnover, loss of staff, and a desperate need for qualified teachers. They are shifting around groups of children, having support staff and administrators fill in teacher positions, focusing more of their time on recruitment/hiring than on leading high quality early learning, closing classrooms, and decreasing enrollment (survey data attached).

Well-Being of the ECE Workforce & Policy Recommendations

Early educators' skills, knowledge, and well-being are inseparable from the quality of children's early learning experiences. Yet, under our system of preparing, supporting, and compensating early educators in the United States, the almost-entirely female ECE workforce struggles to provide for their own families and, in many cases, to put food on the table. Such unlivable wages mean ECE workforce turnover is common, putting children's development at risk, while parents struggle to pay child care costs. In this mostly privatized system, no one wins.

The Early Childhood Workforce Index 2018

This workforce experiences more stress than many other fields, and teachers who are struggling to care for themselves will have difficulty caring for young children. With responsive state policies, we can increase educators' quality of life and job satisfaction, improve job stability in the field, and attract high-quality teachers.

First and foremost, wages that are commensurate with the qualifications and demands of the job are necessary to maintaining an effective workforce. Early educators working in child care centers and family child care programs earn poverty-level wages, earning significantly less than their K-12 peers. And these large income disparities persist between educators working in different settings even when their education levels are comparable.



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Second, the cost of higher education can be an additional financial burden. Because increases in educational attainment are not usually followed with meaningful increases in pay for birth to age 5 educators, it is important that students do not take on significant debt to pay for higher education. Scholarships have increased access to higher education for early childhood teachers in many states.

Higher Education and Professional Learning Contribute to Quality Practice

We have a big divide in the early childhood continuum, from birth to 3rd grade, in terms of what type of professional learning is required and what is accessible. Why? There are separate qualification and certification or licensure policies for educators in different settings. This divided system for B–5 and elementary school educators perpetuate misconceptions that working with younger children requires less knowledge and skills. These disparities foster inequities in compensation, making it more difficult to recruit and retain B–5 educators. Solving this problem is not as easy as simply increasing qualifications. Educators will need time and support to meet new guidelines. We must ensure that increases in education are coupled with substantial salary increases.

In Maine, the qualifications a child can expect her teacher to meet depend more on what her family can afford and the types of programs available in her area, than on her developmental and educational needs. In order to have well-qualified teachers who possess all the knowledge and skills they need, policies should acknowledge that all educators of children B–8 need a similar foundation of knowledge and skills, including a focus on child development, early literacy, math, science, and how to maximize everyday interactions with children by participating in high-quality clinical experiences. In Maine, we have a Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) for early childhood education programs (B-5) called Quality for ME. For programs wanting to reach higher levels, they must have teachers with associates and bachelor's degrees.

Pathways to ECE Credentials & Degrees

It is important to remove barriers that keep early educators from gaining more training and education. Early educators, making very low wages, are usually unable to go back to school because of the high costs of attendance and time constraints. We can take steps to increase access to higher education and support educator success by offering comprehensive scholarships to higher education and more than one way to enter the profession.

Entering the ECE profession might begin with a CTE program or an apprenticeship program, or with an Infant & Toddler credential from Maine Roads to Quality's online course offerings. We can build career pathways by linking these programs with Maine's community colleges and four-year institutions through articulation agreements that create stackable credentials. Career pathways operate on two levels: a systems approach for the workforce at large and an individual approach for each professional seeking advancement.



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We aren't starting from scratch. Maine was a national leader in the development of articulation agreements and the creation of an ECE Core Knowledge program (180 hours of training) that can translate to 9 credits at Maine's community colleges. The University of Maine campuses with teacher education programs have 2+2 articulation agreements with all of Maine's 2-year community colleges. These agreements provide a seamless process for students who want to obtain a bachelors' degree in early childhood education as well as teacher certification. We have already started to build stackable credentials, and now we can add to and refine the current agreements to have multiple, accessible career pathway options.

A Snapshot of Maine Teachers & Staff at Licensed Child Care Centers*

8,473 center-based ECE professionals

- 17.8% have less than High School Diploma or GED
- 18.5% have a high School Diploma or GED
- 13.4% have some college credits (less than two years)
- 7.9% have ECE credential or certificate (one year)
- 12% have an Associate Degree
- 25.8% have a Bachelor's Degree
- 4.5% have a Master's Degree or Doctorate

* 2019 Maine Career Lattice Registry Data

We have over 3,500 teachers working in center-based programs with education and training equal to their public school peers. According to federal statistics, the average salary for elementary and secondary teachers in Maine is around \$50,000. Yet the average salary for ECE teachers in Maine is around \$26,000. And Maine early educators working in child care centers with a bachelor's degree are still paid 25 percent less than their colleagues in the K-12 system.

As a member of the MaineSpark coalition, we support Maine's goal that by the year 2025, 60% of adults in Maine's workforce will hold a postsecondary degree or credential of value in demand by Maine employers.

In a pandemic economy, the child care industry is struggling even further to recruit and retain a child care workforce. As we saw women leaving the workforce in record numbers to care for their children and support remote learning, child care programs felt the exodus as well. We must put policies into place that support the longevity of the child care workforce.

LD 1652 is needed in Maine to support continued commitment to compensation, career pathways, educational attainment, and data collection to evaluate these policy strategies and study the early childhood workforce in Maine. Please support LD 1652 to value the highly skilled, hard work that early educators do each and every day.



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Sources:

The Early Childhood Workforce Index 2020 & 2018

<https://cscce.berkeley.edu/workforce-index-2020/>

NAEYC, Power to the Profession,

https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/our-work/initiatives/power_to_the_profession_01302019.pdf

Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8

A Unifying Foundation (2015), Consensus Study Report

<https://www.nap.edu/catalog/19401/transforming-the-workforce-for-children-birth-through-age-8-a>

Transforming the Financing of Early Care and Education

Issue Brief for Policymakers

<https://www.nap.edu/resource/24984/ECE%20Policymakers.pdf>

National Conference of State Legislatures: Building a Qualified and Supported Early Care and Education Workforce

<http://www.ncsl.org/research/human-services/building-a-qualified-and-supported-early-care-and-education-workforce.aspx>

<https://medium.com/supporting-the-head-start-workforce/to-support-our-nations-earliest-learners-we-must-support-our-earliest-teachers-253d89379954>

https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/edcentral/states-early-education-workforce/?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Early%20and%20Elementary%20Ed%20Update%20444&utm_content=Early%20and%20Elementary%20Ed%20Update%20444+CID_ec41e72433688a892cf224677889b16

<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/early-childhood/reports/2018/10/31/460128/understanding-infant-toddler-child-care-deserts/>

CHILD CARE IN MAINE

One Year in a Pandemic

As of April 2021, Maine has retained most of the licensed child care capacity that we had pre-pandemic (1,621 in April 2021 down from 1,728 in February 2020, according to OCFS Data Dashboard). This could have been much worse, but we have had over 100 new programs open in the past year and the federal relief funds distributed by OCFS, and through PPP and other grants/loans, have kept many programs afloat. The results of this survey highlight why the additional federal relief funds passed in December 2020 and spring 2021 are needed and why a focus on the early childhood workforce is so important when addressing child care needs in Maine.

Q15: What have been your greatest challenges this past year?

The top three answers from family child care programs were

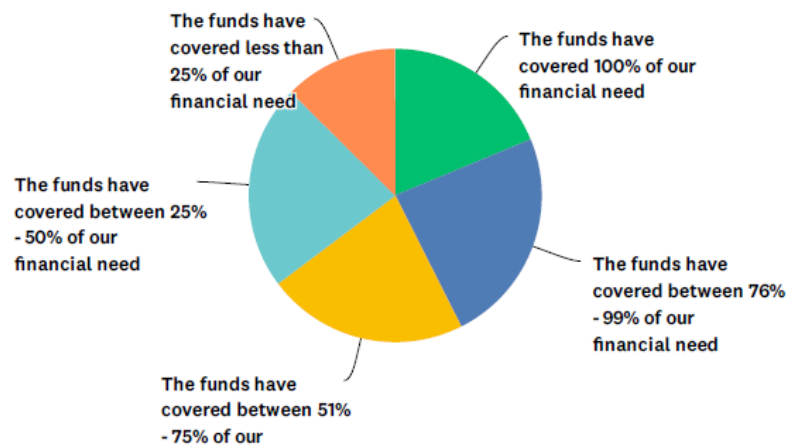
- 43% I have a growing waitlist (can't meet the demand).
- 34% I am under-enrolled (can't fill open slots).
- 29% I am operating at a deficit.

The top three answers from child care centers were

- 58% I am understaffed.
- 44% I am operating at a deficit.
- 43% I have a growing waitlist (can't meet the demand).

Q14: How have the relief funds you have received so far offset the financial impact of COVID-19?

Less than 20% of licensed programs that responded in this survey reported that all their financial needs had been met by relief funds received between spring of 2020 and spring of 2021

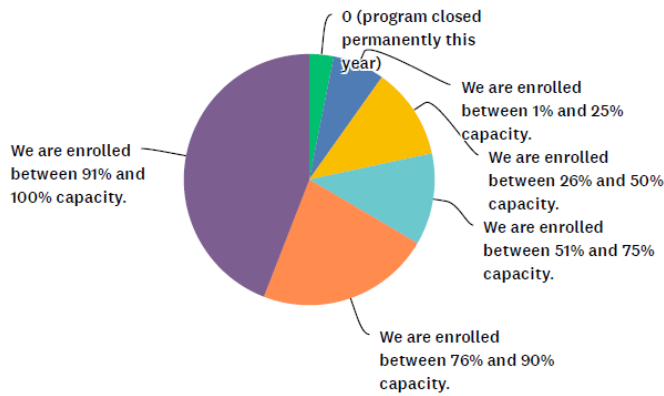


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
The funds have covered 100% of our financial need	18.76%	82
The funds have covered between 76% - 99% of our financial need	23.80%	104
The funds have covered between 51% - 75% of our financial need	22.20%	97
The funds have covered between 25% - 50% of our financial need	22.65%	99
The funds have covered less than 25% of our financial need	12.59%	55
TOTAL		437

Q7: What is your current enrollment?

Family Child Care

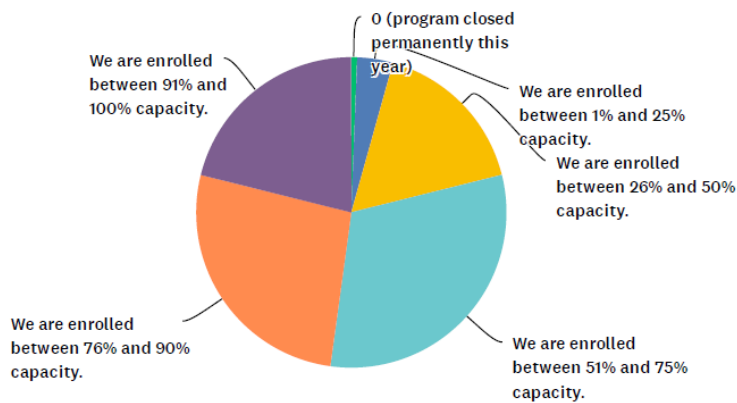
Answered: 254 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
0 (program closed permanently this year)	3.15%	8
We are enrolled between 1% and 25% capacity.	6.69%	17
We are enrolled between 26% and 50% capacity.	11.81%	30
We are enrolled between 51% and 75% capacity.	11.81%	30
We are enrolled between 76% and 90% capacity.	22.44%	57
We are enrolled between 91% and 100% capacity.	44.09%	112
TOTAL		254

Center-Based Child Care

Answered: 161 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
0 (program closed permanently this year)	0.62%	1
We are enrolled between 1% and 25% capacity.	3.73%	6
We are enrolled between 26% and 50% capacity.	16.77%	27
We are enrolled between 51% and 75% capacity.	31.06%	50
We are enrolled between 76% and 90% capacity.	26.71%	43
We are enrolled between 91% and 100% capacity.	21.12%	34
TOTAL		161

While 95% of licensed child care programs are open, many have continued to experience significant financial struggle throughout the pandemic. One of the best ways to understand this is to look at enrollment versus licensed capacity. If a program is only enrolled at 50% then they are likely bringing in about 50% of the revenue that they would normally use to cover costs.

We found that the best way to look at this data was by comparing two charts, one for family child care and one for child care centers, since you can see that most family child care programs in Maine are more fully enrolled at this time than child care centers. This helps explain why so many centers continue to experience larger financial struggles (shown in data from questions 10 and 11 in this survey, MaineAEYC can provide full survey data upon request).

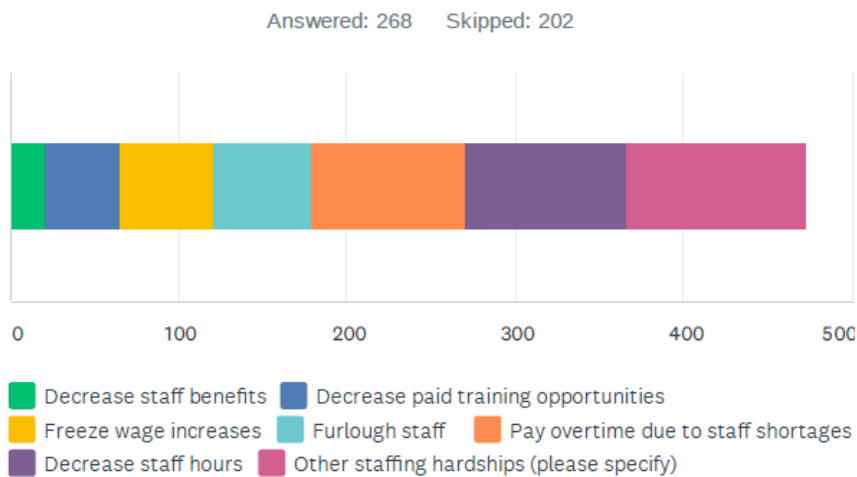
Q8: If your enrollment is down, what are some of the reasons?

For family child care respondents, who are experiencing lower enrollment, 42% have done so purposely to mitigate COVID-19 risks, 33% have kept below their capacity to follow health and safety guidelines, and 37% have seen less interest in group care from parents.

For child care center respondents, who are experiencing lower enrollment, 52% have seen less interest in group care from parents, 48% have had to stay below capacity due to staffing shortages, and 38% have kept below their capacity to follow health and safety guidelines.

Q16: In regards to staffing, have you had to do any of the following?

Furlough staff, freeze wage increases, decrease staff benefits, decrease staff paid training opportunities, decrease staff hours, pay overtime due to staff shortages.



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Decrease staff benefits	7.46%	20
Decrease paid training opportunities	16.42%	44
Freeze wage increases	20.90%	56
Furlough staff	22.01%	59
Pay overtime due to staff shortages	33.96%	91
Decrease staff hours	35.82%	96
Other staffing hardships (please specify)	39.93%	107
Total Respondents: 268		

STAFFING

Open-Ended Comments

STAFFING SHORTAGES

- I can't find anyone to hire to meet the need in my area.
- I have been unable to fill open positions.
- Staff found other income during the time that our school was closed this year and have not returned.
- We have been unable to find qualified staff - our position requires in-person work with children diagnosed with special needs, and so many people are either not qualified at the level that our state requires, or do not want to work in person during COVID.
- We lost so many staff this past year.
- When COVID first hit we closed the center down due to a very limited number of children attending. As we opened our doors back up, we still had low enrollment numbers which resulted in fewer hours for the employees that came back first. We are now struggling to hire new teachers and staff.
- There is no one available to hire so I can't take on more children until I can hire.
- I am unable to find quality staff. Or ANY staff at this point
- We have employment opportunities but can't find anyone. Therefore we are not operating at full capacity and have 13 children on our wait list.
- We cannot take more kids because it's hard to find staffing.
- As the director I am also having to teach due to the lack of staff.
- We have had to close our preschool room, and are now only operating with one classroom and one teacher in the infant and toddler room, with a maximum of 4 children on any given day. We are licensed for 20.
- We struggled to find new staff and some staff haven't returned. We heard over and over again they make more collecting unemployment benefits than working in child care. They have always deserved more compensation, and I'm happy that unemployment helped this year, but I need them back. I can't pay them more, unless I raise parent tuition, and they should be able to make more money than minimum wage in early care and education.

HEALTHY AND SAFETY

- My employee could not work for most of the year due to age and COVID risks. I had paid her and another employee, as I didn't want her to go unpaid.
- Anytime we had to shut down because of Covid-19, several employees did not return to work, because they feared for their safety.
- I had two teachers take a leave of absence because of COVID.
- We let our older staff stay home due to risk this past year.
- Staff have had to quarantine and miss work unpaid. We continue to struggle with staff being out do to quarantining requirements of their children or themselves.
- We closed in March of 2020 and have not opened yet due to low enrollment, covid concerns. Hopefully, this coming fall when this virus is under control, parents will be less stressed and allow their children to attend if they can afford to.

REMOTE SCHOOL

- We had to have extra staff on site to support remote learning with our school-age kids.
- Staff have had to take extra time off and leaves of absence due to public school closure and needing to be home with their own children.
- We had to cut our infant room due to staffing shortages. We now the room for school age online learning and moved staff around to accommodate school age children in our child care.

- Many of our veteran teachers resigned so that they could do remote school with their school age children this year.
- Our staffing has been greatly impacted by schools having remote learning and short closures at schools. Our workforce has school-aged children that needed support at home, and not being the bread winners or being single parents, many of our teachers and staff left and were home this year.

UNPREDICATIBILITY

- I had to increase staffing hours due to changing age groups of children served and COVID protocols.
- Absences cause hardship: finding substitutes, having to hire extra staff to plan for these absences, providing continuity to children in light of absences, and managing staff fear.
- Staff have struggled through no lunch breaks, mandatory overtime, and denied time off requests just so we could stay open.
- Every month we have days and weeks of losing staff to COVID exposure, paying all staff if they are out due to testing, exposure or illness.
- Difficulty finding substitutes and maintaining ratios when staff are out. This was a problem before COVID, but it nearly impossible now.
- We schedule staff to be over staffed in case of call outs, staff stays home if any COVID symptoms, and staff get called to pick up their child from school when there is a Covid closure, so it's hard to operate and stay open when staffing is so unpredictable.

CLOSURES & FINANCIAL STRUGGLE

- I have suffered the loss of my own pay, in order to reopen and stay open.
- I had to close due to low numbers and inability to find staff.
- I'm not able to hire staff with the lower income I have coming in, due to lower enrollment.
- I do not have the number of children I used to have, and really do not need to have two people on, but I don't want to lose them so I keep paying them with grant money.
- My husband works with me. He received no pay during this time
- Lack of substitutes has been huge problem but also paying substitutes while operating at reduced enrollment due to covid has put our budget in jeopardy.
- Couldn't hire subs due to lack of income with lower than normal enrollment.

STRATEGIES TO RETAIN STAFF

- We are fortunate to have had the support of Head Start and were able to continue to pay our staff and receive federal funding to support the additional expenses.
- Increased pay for current employees to retain them
- Increased wages to hire quality people and increased wages for those employees already hired. We're not operating with full enrollment of children so with higher wages not at full capacity has made it challenging and put us close to a permanent closure.
- I have kept all my staff and kept my early care and education program going. I did this by increasing wages (\$3-\$5/hr per employee) and offering paid training hours (up to 30 hours) to incentivize staff to stay. My PPP loan/grant helped with this strategy, but I also had to increase parent tuition and was not able to give myself a raise along with my teachers.

Methodology and Demographics

This online survey was created by the Maine Association for the Education of Young Children (MaineAEYC), Family Child Care Association of Maine (FCCAM), Maine Head Start Directors Association (MHSDA), and YMCA Alliance of Northern New England, and conducted by MaineAEYC using SurveyMonkey. The survey was sent by email to all licensed child care programs in Maine and followed up by additional outreach from MaineAEYC, FCCAM, Head Starts, and YMCA leadership, and was completed between March 26th and April 5th, 2021.

The survey represents the responses of a non-randomized sample of 470 individuals who own or lead one licensed child care program or several programs (as indicated by their answer to question 4), in total the data represents 598 licensed child care programs, or 37% of licensed programs in Maine. 54% of respondents come from family child care homes, 9% from licensed small facilities, 2% from out of school time programs, and 35% from center-based child care, including nursery schools, Head Starts, and YMCAs.

The respondents represent providers in all 16 counties in Maine, with the percent of respondents from 14 of the counties falling between 0.01 and 1.2 of the percent of licensed programs in that county compared to all licensed programs in Maine. Cumberland County was overrepresented by 3% and York County was underrepresented by 2.5%. Given the constantly changing and widely varying nature of the COVID-19 crisis, the analysis from this survey is intended to present the experiences of the respondents, as captured in the moment that they take the survey, which may show trends in the experiences of the field and industry at large.