

Testimony of Sara Perrigo

Member of MaineAEYC

before the Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business in support of

LD 1652 An Act To Build a Child Care System by Recruiting and Retaining Maine's Early Childhood Educators Workforce will be heard before the IDEA Committee

May 11, 2021

House Speaker Ryan Fecteau, and distinguished members of the Committee On Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business, my name is Sara and I'm a Co-Director at Heidi's House Child Care Center. I strongly support this proposal to develop career pathways for early educators, including professional supports, and a focus on compensation.

I have worked in the field of Early Childhood Education for nearly 24 years. I have worked as a Center Director for over half of my career and have never seen such a shortage of qualified applicants as I have in the last 3 years. Now with the current pandemic it is at a point where it impacts our ability keep our child care center open. We have a waitlist for every age group, yet we have classrooms that are only partially filled because we cannot hire qualified teachers. We work very hard to have a strong benefits package (including vacation time, personal time, health insurance, vision and dental insurance, 401K with a match, gym membership reimbursement, quarterly bonuses, etc.) and we keep our compensation very competitive for the field. We also have been Nationally Accredited by NAEYC for 15 years and offer high quality care. And yet, still we struggle. The result of this struggle can lead to offering less child care spots until the proper teachers are hired (adding to our large waitlist of families in need of care or unhappy with their current care), teachers and administrators working overtime to make up for being understaffed and setting them up for burn out and then increasing turnover. This is a huge concern for us, as the need for high quality care is important for Maine's children and families and important for Maine's workforce.

Maine's children and families need a strong, sustainable early care and education system. Without early care and education programs, parents cannot work. Without workers, our state and local economies suffer. Since the teachers in child care programs are a critical part of the system, we need effective strategies to recruit and retain early childhood educators. LD1584 will grow our early childhood workforce supporting Maine's future prosperity.