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

**L.D. 1652: An Act To Build a Child Care System by Recruiting and Retaining
Maine's Early Childhood Educators Workforce**

May 11, 2021

Senator Curry, Representative Roberts, and distinguished members of the Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business, my name is Kristen Pollard and I'm the Chief Programs Operations Officer of the Bangor Region YMCA. I strongly support this proposal to develop career pathways for early educators, which includes increasing access to affordable professional advancement opportunities and a focus on fair compensation.

As the person responsible for overseeing all of our child care programs, I have found it is challenging to find qualified staff that meet the standards required by the state of Maine. There are barriers that prevent staff from getting the necessary qualifications. Some of these barriers include cost and available course work during times they are not working. The expectations of these roles, does not correlate to the compensation and it is difficult to retain staff. When staff turnover is high, it disrupts the child care programs and the quality of care we are able to provide our participants. We absolutely want the best, most qualified staff, as we know how important that is to the care and education of our participants. We strongly urge you to pass this bill in support of our children and our staff.

Ensuring that all young children have an equal opportunity for healthy growth and development is a long-term investment in Maine's future prosperity. 90% of a child's brain develops as early as five years old, and positive early learning experiences establish strong foundations for the brain's architecture. Early educators play an important role in young children's learning and development. They help set the foundation for children's future success.

Collectively, the YMCA is the largest early care and education provider in Maine. We serve more than 1,500 children at 59 childcare sites across the state. We stand in agreement with our partners in the field, including MaineAEYC, the Family Child Care Association of Maine, the Maine Head Start Directors' Association, and the Right from the Start Coalition, in support of L.D. 1652. With smart investments in our early education system such as this, we can increase Maine families' access to high quality and affordable care and help children reach their full potential.

Contact: Kristen Pollard, Chief Programs Operations Officer, Bangor Region YMCA
P: (207)941-2808 **E:** kpollard@bangory.org