

**Testimony of Sasha Shunk, state licensed and nationally accredited family child care provider, before the Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement, and Business Committee, in support of**  
***LD 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 honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement, and Business, my name is Sasha Shunk, I have been a licensed family child care provider in Portland for over 17 years. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in favor of LD 1652.

I could spend time talking about the importance of brain development, social and emotional skill building, and a multitude of other reasons to support early childhood education. But, today I am going to focus on the positive financial and economic impact early childhood programs make for the communities.

Child care is the workforce behind the workforce, because my family child care is open today, 20 parents are able to go to work. If I have to close, 20 businesses are at risk of losing a productive employee. This is already happening in my community, families are struggling because they cannot find childcare, businesses are struggling because they cannot find employees. In Portland, there are literally not enough child care slots for the number of children in the city. Unfortunately this is a common theme around our state.

A strong economy is dependent on thriving businesses. For a business to thrive, they must have reliable employees. In order to have reliable employees, those employees need access to high quality child care.

In the past 18 months, 100 family child care programs have closed, though COVID had an impact, over the past several years providers are retiring at a faster rate than new programs are opening. Often family child care providers, especially those who provide care for low income families are making below minimum wage themselves. I just completed my master's research project and when participants were asked the question what their income breaks down to hourly, 21% of respondents reported making less than \$12 per hour. It is incredibly challenging to recruit people to enter this field, when the pay is so low and the benefits non-existent.

This bill will help support wage supplements, scholarships for educational degrees, apprenticeship programs, and so much more.

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.

LD 1652 is the right choice for Maine. I strongly urge you to support this bill.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

*Sasha Shunk*

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