



Testimony of Anne Soto  
member of the Maine Association for the Education of Young Children

before the Health and Human Services Committee 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 honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement, and Business, my name is Anne Soto, I am a resident of Biddeford, ME and I am here today to testify in favor of LD 1652.

I am the Assistant Director at The Children’s Center in Portland and a current parent. Early Childhood Education Programs run on very tight margins. Most programs are solely funded by the tuition charged to parents and parents already struggle to afford many of the programs. This means that most centers do not have the capability to raise wages without also raising the tuition they charge parents, which has led childcare to be extremely expensive and therefore exclusive, often leaving behind the very children who need help most. Every child deserves the opportunity to access quality child care while their parents work.

The tight margins also lead to low wages, making it nearly impossible for early childhood educators to pay for their higher education. Staffing schools with qualified teachers is proven to lead to higher quality education for our children. Yet it is hard to find or retain qualified staff when we can not afford to pay back our student loans for education degrees. I for one, struggle to make the minimum payment on my Masters in Education on my salary.

Additionally, most teachers in early childhood can not afford to send their own children to the centers they work for. Both my husband and I work in an Early Childhood Center, our wages are on the higher end of what early educators make in Maine, yet we are unable to send either of our children to our center without the benefit of the Child Care Subsidy provided for low income families by the State.

While parents are a child’s first and primary teachers, most Maine children under age six have both parents in the workforce. These are families who rely on the support of early care and education. Many parents report having difficulty finding child care, as there is limited availability. Even after being on a waitlist for years, families do not always gain access to the full time care they need. For too many families, including my own, child care is not just a strain on our finances, it’s completely unaffordable. The average annual cost for Maine center-based child

care is on par with, or more than, University of Maine's annual tuition. Centers simply can not continue to raise tuition for parents to pay higher wages for their teachers.

LD 1652, will help Maine's early childcare and education programs recruit and retain a diverse and qualified workforce as well as achieve financial sustainability. Early childhood providers are the backbone of the economy and we need your help. I urge you to support this bill that will help early childhood centers continue to provide their essential service to the families of Maine.