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Testimony of Lonney A. Steeves  
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 Lonney Steeves and I'm the Director of the Winthrop Area YMCA, and we operate two childcare programs, one in Winthrop and one in Monmouth. 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.

- **The biggest issue that faces our program is finding and retaining staff because of the low pay rate. We are limited in what we can offer. We can only pay them what our registration fees will cover. This means if we want to be open to all families especially low / medium incomes our per hour rate stays just above the minimum wage.**
- **One of our biggest issues is finding qualified people to work for our program. Most are parents, and getting the needed education is difficult in getting to classes, and even more paying for those classes**
- **Each year we begin our ramp up to the next school year, trying to find staff. This happens because for many reasons have moved on to other positions. We have lost staff this year simply because another job would pay more and offer more hours.**

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.

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