

LD 1652 Fecteau Childcare Workforce Testimony — Yvette Unezase

My name is Yvette Unezase, I'm a mother of 3 boys. As an immigrant, after moving to the US in 2013, like most other women, I had no choice but to become a stay at home mom for at least a year and half because of a lack of accessible and affordable childcare. Finding information on where to apply for childcare was the first challenge, then after finding one that has a spot was almost impossible. Another issue was to be enrolled in childcare subsidy. Applying in childcare subsidy you have to find a job first. The greatest barrier in entering the job market, especially for mothers/single parents. Seeking for a job without knowing where your kids would stay, is a big challenge. As a professional immigrant, I had first to find an entry level job at the minimum wage and childcare issues stayed the same due to the high cost of living in Cumberland county-Maine.

Resulting from the unmet need to raise children in a professional setting while continuing working to be able to help our families to settle down, I and my 2 other women in my community shared the same challenges that many other immigrant/refugee families were experiencing. We identified the need for a multicultural and affordable childcare center that could support underserved communities including immigrants, refugees and low/middle income families and decided to start the process of forming a Childcare Cooperative. Our program will serve the needs of our children, neighboring communities with childcare services and offer stable employment to the members and non-members. We really want to advocate for underserved communities whom most of them have no or entry level and non-professional jobs. But by doing so, they fall under the category of non qualified for Childcare Subsidy. We are really thankful and recognize our State efforts to help families in need but the cost of living is significantly very high for low/middle income families. Which means that those families have no choice but to work for long hours, second, night and weekend shifts but still can't afford to pay for childcare and can't be enrolled to Childcare subsidy program because of its high demanding requirements.

Oh the other hand, as we all know Early childhood is the most sensitive, critical period of a child's life, it is really important to address educational and environmental issues that childcare providers have faced and are still facing, if we want all our kids (inclusively) to have a strong foundation for their bright future. I'm pretty sure that with COVID-19 challenges, everyone has experienced in one way or the other how essential Childcare is and how rewarding this program is supposed to be. If we don't have a safe place to leave our kids to go to work we are stuck and we are economically suffering and the circle of poverty for most families has no end.

Most of the challenges childcare providers (existing and new ones) are facing are due to the lack of enough financial resources which result in educators' low pay and less benefits. Finding qualified educators with low pay, high turnover and high cost of compliance requirements are the most common reasons for childcare closures (for existing childcare). Which makes it more complicated for new interested providers to open new childcares. I'm sure that voting for [LD](#)

[1652](#), “An Act To Build a Child Care System by Recruiting and Retaining Maine's Early Childhood Workforce,” Sponsored by Speaker Fecteau would be the best way to resolve most of the challenges childcare programs are facing which will make them accessible, affordable for many families but also a place to grow long term careers for educators and business opportunities for many childcare providers. All these three stakeholders are keys as a path to success for all our kids.

I do believe that offering affordable and yet high quality childcare to families is only possible if our State representatives and senators support [LD 1652](#) which will empower childcare providers, educators but also underserved communities. The more childcare providers will be financially supported, the educators will be fairly paid and more people (diverse population) will be interested in early childhood learning which will empower existing childcares and give opportunity to open new ones. As a result, childcare programs will be accessible and affordable to families in need. Also, if we want to empower our underserved population socio-economically, the power can not be achieved without enough community support, resources, and foundational development that is culturally appropriate to support children and their families, as they seek a better life.
