

Testimony of Jenn Wiles, Communications Coordinator
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**Comment on LD 1652, AN ACT TO BUILD A CHILD CARE SYSTEM BY
RECRUITING AND RETAINING MAINE'S EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATOR
WORKFORCE**

Joint Standing Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement, and Business
May 11, 2021

Senator Curry, Representative Roberts, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement, and Business, good morning. My name is Jenn Wiles and I am the Communications Coordinator at Maine Roads to Quality Professional Development Network. MRTQ PDN is a partnership among the Cutler Institute at the University of Southern Maine, the University of Maine Center for Community Inclusion and Disability Studies, and the Maine Afterschool Network. We work to promote and support professionalism in the field of early childhood education and to improve quality through the provision of a statewide system of professional development. MRTQ PDN is funded by the Maine Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Child and Family Services, Child Care Development Block Grant. I am here today to offer comment on LD 1652.

Maine Roads to Quality established one of the first early childhood educator professional registries in the country in 1999. Since then, we have grown to include over 11,000 Active Members who have reported to us in the past three years about their employment, training, and/or educational attainment. Because the MRTQ Registry is currently voluntary for individuals, Maine does not have reliable data about the true size of the workforce. However, **we are able to show that as of 2020, only 37% of Active Registry Members are credentialed in early childhood education** (or a related field), down from 56% ten years ago (Figure 1).

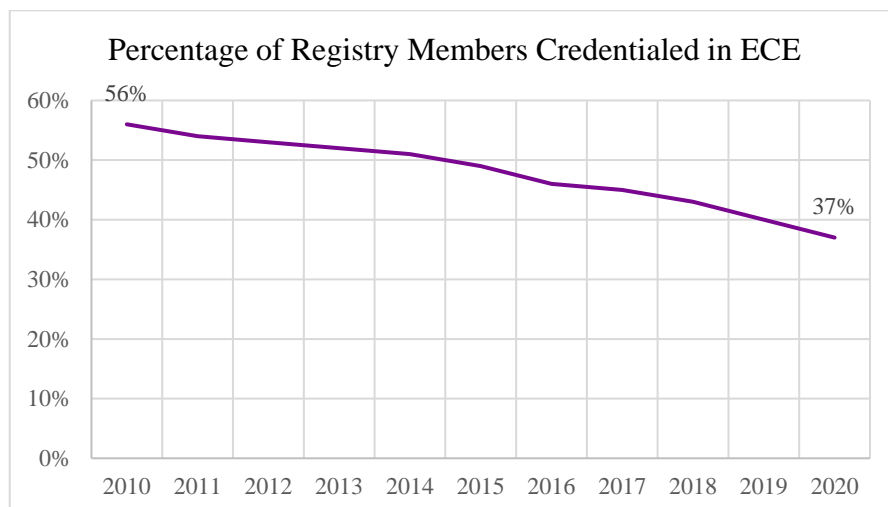


Figure 1 (Retrieved from the MRTQ Registry, May 10, 2021)

The cause of this shift is unclear, though the discontinuation of the MRTQ PDN Scholarship Program in 2016 likely had an impact.

While the cause may be unknown, the lack of a credentialed workforce has critical known effects. MRTQ PDN staff regularly hear from professionals in the field about how difficult it is to hire and retain qualified staff. As one center director shared, “[W]e are currently at a Step 2 with *Quality for ME*... basically the only thing that keeps us from being at Step 3 with *Quality for ME* is the educational level of my staff.” To improve families’ access to higher quality programs (those at Steps 3 and 4), programs must be able to recruit and retain credentialed staff.

Figure 2 shows that **only 17% of children receiving Child Care Subsidy Program funds attend programs with a Step 3 or 4 rating with *Quality for ME***, Maine’s quality rating and improvement system. Higher Step ratings require a percentage of staff to be at a Level 5 on the MRTQ Direct Care Career Lattice.

Children on Subsidy Receiving High Quality Early Childhood Education Services

The goal of the Child Care Subsidy Program is to support families in accessing high quality early childhood education services. This report shows the percentage of children receiving a subsidy through the Child Care Subsidy Program whose early childhood education provider has a quality rating score of 3 or 4 of all children receiving subsidy.

Point in Time Data

Age Group	State
ALL	17%
INFANT	10%
TODDLER	15%
PRE SCHOOL	19%
SCHOOL AGE	15%

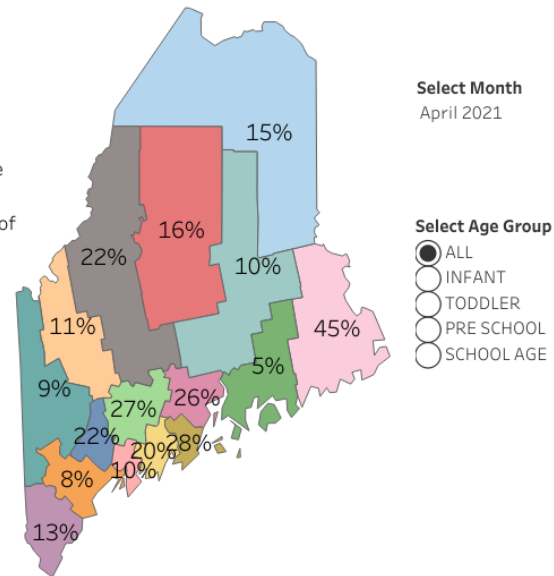


Figure 2 (Retrieved from <https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/ocfs/data-reports-initiatives/early-childhood-education>, May 10, 2021)

An individual achieves Level 5 on the MRTQ Direct Care Career Lattice with a BA/BS in early childhood education or a related field. **Importantly, individuals can also achieve Level 5 with a combination of experience and an AA/AS or an early childhood credential.** LD 1652 supports multiple pathways for professionals in early childhood programs to gain experience (e.g. Apprenticeships), earn early childhood credentials and degrees (e.g. Scholarships), and articulate credentials and coursework into degree programs (e.g. Articulation Agreements). Paired with salary supplements and support for a diverse workforce that includes immigrants, these pathways open opportunities for career advancement to current and future early childhood professionals in Maine, which will in turn lead to more individuals earning Level 5 on the MRTQ Direct Care Career Lattice. Higher numbers of qualified staff earning a living wage will help move programs up the Steps with *Quality for ME* and will increase options for quality care for families statewide.



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Should LD 1652 become law, MRTQ PDN looks forward to working with all partners involved in our role as the professional development network for Maine. MRTQ PDN can also provide additional current and historical data on Registry membership, including breakdowns by setting, region, and Career Lattice level, should that be helpful for the work session on LD 1652.

Thank you.