

**WRITTEN TESTIMONY BY STEVE deCASTRO, CEO, GORHAM SAVINGS BANK
AND MEMBER, READYNATION
BEFORE THE INNOVATION, DEVELOPMENT, ECONOMIC ADVANCEMENT
AND BUSINESS 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”**

9:30 a.m. Tuesday May 11, 2021

Dear Senator Curry, Representative Roberts, Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business,

Please accept my written testimony in support of LD 1652, “An Act to Build a Child Care System by Recruiting and Retaining Maine’s Early Childhood Educators Workforce.” I offer my comments as a business leader, as a member of Educate Maine’s Board of Directors and as a member of the business organization ReadyNation. In this capacity I also support the MaineSpark Coalition and its work toward achieving Maine’s educational attainment goal that 60 percent of Maine adults have a credential of value by 2025.

I believe that the lack of access to quality early learning is an economic issue for Maine.

Earlier this year, I read several news reports and editorials commenting on the fragility of the child care sector, how that was made worse by the pandemic, and the ongoing struggles within the child care workforce plagued by low wages, long hours, and high turnover. And the fact that all these issues are more challenging in rural Maine.

That’s not good for Maine’s economy or for industries like banking where so many workers rely on child care so they can work with the peace of mind that their children are safe, and nurtured. Nor is it good for our young children.

From a business perspective, the lack of access to quality early learning and child care programs, especially those faced by rural children and their families, is a significant economic challenge for Maine.

As policymakers know well, in addition to having the oldest population in the country, Maine is also the most rural state. Nearly a quarter – [23 percent](#) – of kids in rural Maine live in poverty. They often lack access to resources, including early education programs and child care. In fact, a recent Council for a Strong America report indicates [26 percent](#) of Maine’s rural children today live in “child care deserts,” where three times more kids are eligible for child care than there are open slots.

Quality early learning and child care programs significantly help kids build a strong foundation for success [throughout school](#) and [as adults](#). They are a key part of the

solution to increasing both the number of people in Maine's workforce and their skill level—two of Maine's biggest economic challenges. These programs can also serve to attract new families to our state, helping to grow Maine's workforce.

For all of these reasons, I am pleased to support Speaker Fecteau's bill as the starting point for addressing many of Maine's child care workforce challenges. And I encourage all of you to access the new federal child care funding through the recent American Rescue Plan Act to fund this bill.

It is an economic imperative that Maine prioritize investments that improve access to quality early care and education programs for our kids. It also is our responsibility to make sure every child – regardless of where they live – has access to the resources that will help them succeed in life.

Thank you for your consideration of my comments and your work and dedication to building a strong economy for Maine.

Sincerely,

Steve deCastro
president and CEO, Gorham Savings Bank
Gorham