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Testimony of Heather Marden,  
on behalf of the Maine Association for the Education of Young Children (MaineAEYC),  
and Deb Arcaro,  
on behalf of the Family Child Child Care Association of Maine (FCCAM)  
before the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, in support of  
**LD 1559: Resolve, To Create the Commission To Develop a  
Paid Family and Medical Leave Benefits Program**  
April 26th, 2021

Senator Hickman, Representative Sylvester, and esteemed members of the Labor and Housing Committee. We are writing on behalf of the Maine Association for the Education of Young Children (MaineAEYC) and the Family Child Care Association of Maine (FCCAM). We are submitting testimony in support of LD 1559: Resolve, To Create the Commission To Develop a Paid Family and Medical Leave Benefits Program.

*MaineAEYC promotes high-quality early learning for all children, birth through age 8, by connecting practice, policy, and research. We advance a diverse, dynamic early childhood profession and support all who care for, educate, and work on behalf of young children and families.*

*The mission of the Family Child Care Association of Maine (FCCAM) is to unify, promote and strengthen quality professional family child care in the State of Maine.*

Maine's child care workforce is made up of predominantly women and is among the lowest paid industries in Maine. In addition to low wages, low profit margins leave child care owners without enough overhead to provide paid family and medical leave. These educators are exposed to a multitude of germs from young children daily, often they have children of their own who get sick and need their care, and when faced with going to work sick or losing a day's wage, they choose to work while sick. A sole family child care provider rarely has a safety net when needing family or medical leave. If they have to take time off for such instances, they lose all income for that length of time.

The child care workforce is critical to the economy. Yet, this workforce is depleting fast. This industry cannot compete with bigger businesses who can offer the paid leave that adults need to maintain the health of themselves and their family. Adding paid family and medical leave would incentivise the child care workforce to remain in the profession knowing they can pursue

their passion while also having the safety net of this benefit, if needed. Child care educators with no access to paid leave are more likely to leave their jobs when they have to take time off to address a family or medical need.

In addition to the benefits paid leave would provide the child care industry, this policy would also help support families who need to access child care. There is a lack of infant care in Maine. Infants also cannot attend child care until they are 6 weeks old, yet too many parents are not offered the 6-8 weeks of time off with their newborn as recommended by physicians. What does a new parent do up until the 6 week mark when they need to return to work, but cannot access child care? Providing parents paid leave to provide care for their newborn, not only fits the structure of our child care system, but it is also a healthy policy for newborns and mothers who are recovering postpartum. Being a parent of a newborn is stressful enough, and piling financial and work stress on top of that can add to Maine's high rates of adverse childhood experiences, and can jeopardize bonding and secure attachments with parents and caregivers that infants need for healthy development.

Please support LD 474 to provide the small businesses of child care with this important benefit that will help retain its workforce and also support the structure of the child care system so parents have time to access child care while supporting that important family bond with a newborn.