

Testimony of Simon West for The Maine State Chamber of Commerce 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 esteemed members of the Committee On  
Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business.

My name is Simon West from Gardiner and I represent the Maine State Chamber of  
Commerce, a statewide business association made up of both large and small businesses, here to  
provide you with our written testimony in support of L.D. 1652, An Act To Build a Child Care  
System by Recruiting and Retaining Maine's Early Childhood Educators Workforce.

I offer this testimony as a representative of the State Chamber but also in the capacity of  
our partnership with the Right From The Start Coalition. The Coalition aims to create systems  
and pursue legislation that supports access to effective, quality childcare and early education.  
All Maine families deserve access to a healthy childcare system. The pandemic has highlighted  
that early childcare has a workforce shortage. This leaves access to programs that promote  
healthy learning and social/emotional development in the hands of families with excess means.  
Maine is working hard to develop an education system that can cultivate skilled adults ready for  
rewarding careers. When research has shown us that a child's future academic and career  
performance can be accurately estimated by developmental stages achieved prior to entering  
kindergarten, it becomes apparent that our work on the later years could suffer from a lack of  
attention to earlier years. This bill will help ensure that our great efforts in high schools, career  
& technical education centers, community colleges, and the university system are being  
supported by early education. Early education can create the foundation necessary to make our  
current goals more attainable.

This bill can make a real impact on the early education workforce issue due to how it  
addresses the shortage at multiple causal points, not just one or two. The bill increases wages in  
the field to help with demand and retention. The bill also creates more pathways to early  
childcare careers and boosts the quality of early childcare providers by expanding early  
childhood education programs at career and technical education centers, increasing  
apprenticeships at childcare programs, and providing scholarships toward associate and  
bachelor's degrees in early childhood education.

Many stakeholders will benefit from the passing of this bill. The most obvious are early childcare workers, children, families, and employers.

Maine has already worked to pass a bill that increases high school teacher pay due to the many benefits students receive when teachers are lifted out of poverty. While the focus has been on high school teachers it is important to know that early childcare educators are paid 25% less than their K-8 colleagues and that their poverty rate is 8.3x higher. Wage increases will increase the supply of early childcare educators, helping to solve the shortage issue. It will also make the field more competitive, ultimately increasing the quality of early childcare education. The bill does this in a way that does not impact the family's ability to afford childcare. Aside from wage increases the other system changes proposed in the bill will generate additional pathways to the field while ensuring that these new early childcare providers are properly qualified.

Families and employers will benefit because families will be less apt to make hard decisions about how to afford or find childcare. This will allow single parents to know that their child is receiving quality care while they are at work and two parent families will be more likely to have both parents able to pursue careers. Families will have less unnecessary stress and employers will have an opportunity to hire new talent as parents who were once forced out of the workforce begin reentry.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide you with our written testimony.