

Maine Women's Lobby

THE VOICE OF MAINE WOMEN

Testimony of Whitney Parrish

Maine Women's Lobby

In support of LD 1584

An Act to Attract, Build and Retain an Early Childhood Education Workforce through Increased Training, Education and Career Pathways

May 9, 2019

Senator Herbig, Representative Daughtry, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement, and Business: my name is Whitney Parrish, Director of Policy and Program for the Maine Women's Lobby. The Maine Women's Lobby is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, statewide membership organization devoted to raising the economic, social, and political status of Maine's 678,000 women and girls. We are also a proud member of the Right From the Start Coalition.

I am pleased to speak to you today in strong support of LD 1584, *An Act to Attract, Build and Retain an Early Childhood Education Workforce through Increased Training, Education and Career Pathways*.

Put simply, we are in a child care crisis. This is especially true for early childhood education, meaning infant care up to preschool. There aren't enough spots available for our children, which translates into more and more parents, especially mothers, leaving and staying out of the workforce. Simultaneously, there aren't enough early childhood education professionals, often women, able to stay in their desired profession due to low pay and all-around lack of incentive. Attracting, building, and retaining an early childhood education workforce is of critical importance to the success of Maine women, children, families, and the short- and long-term health of our state's economy. We often talk in these committee rooms about attracting and retaining young families to Maine, and it is key there as well.

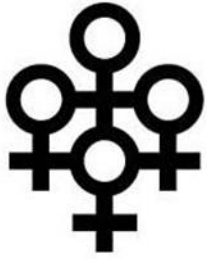
Increased access to child care is an especially promising anti-poverty policy because it is intergenerational: it gives parents the time to work, and kids the educational opportunities they need to succeed.ⁱ Over the past six months, our community organizer, Jen, traveled around the state speaking to women about their experiences with child care. Although the women's backgrounds varied widely, there were several glaring concerns they nearly universally expressed. The majority of respondents, though geographically and economically diverse, said resoundingly that they struggled with the availability of child care in their area, and they struggled to afford the high costs to place their child in quality care.

ⁱ "Child Care as an Intergenerational Solution to Poverty." New America. Retrieved at <https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/edcentral/child-care-intergenerational-solution-poverty/>

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With early childhood educators supported through programs like those proposed in LD 1584, more parents would be able to obtain childcare in the first place, with the added benefit of knowing that their children are receiving high quality, affordable care. With access to child care comes access to economic security; most of us here today would not be able to do the jobs we do without the benefit of child care, and this should be afforded to every Mainer regardless of economic status or privilege.

Likewise, we cannot expect the people caring for our children day in and day out to continue doing the vital work with which they are tasked while living in poverty. We can't expect people making \$11 an hour with no skills training to care for our children, many of whom often have special needs or behavior challenges. We cannot blame them when they move on from a job they love because they can't make ends meet or they can't afford education costs that come with possible, but not guaranteed, advancement within their field.

We need to invest in our children, families, and economy by investing in our child care workers and providers. Investing in them means valuing their labor, incentivizing their work, and ensuring that they are a valued part of our workforce. We strongly urge you to vote ought to pass on LD 1584. Thank you for your time.

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