



Maine Women's Lobby

THE VOICE OF MAINE WOMEN

Testimony of Whitney Parrish
Maine Women's Lobby
Member of the Right from the Start Coalition
In support of LD 1417
An Act To Expand Access to Head Start To Assist Opioid-affected
and Other At-risk Families
April 17, 2019

Senator Gratwick, Representative Hymanson, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services: 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 1417, *An Act To Expand Access to Head Start To Assist Opioid-affected and Other At-risk Families*.

Head Start is a proven program that enhances the cognitive, social, and emotional development of low-income children under age 5, preparing them to enter school ready to learn. It was designed specifically to help break the cycle of poverty. The early years of a child's life are critical because early experiences affect the architecture of the developing brain. Just as a strong foundation is essential for a building, a healthy start in life can make a tremendous difference in a person's school and life success. This is especially critical for our most vulnerable children, specifically those who are opioid-affected or have experienced other adverse childhood experiences.ⁱ

Head Start services benefit parents as well as children, with a wide range of health and social services determined by a Family Needs Assessment. This helps families reach self-sufficiency while providing safe, stimulating childcare that allows parents to attend school or work. Since 58% of Maine households with children under the age of 5 are headed by single women living in poverty,ⁱⁱ Head Start directly benefits women and their families.

ⁱ *Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2019. Retrieved from: <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childabuseandneglect/acestudy/index.html>

ⁱⁱ 2009-2013 5-Year American Community Survey. United State Census Bureau. Retrieved from: <http://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=bkmk>

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Because it is uniquely situated to help support opioid-affected and at-risk children and families, Head Start can help lift children and families, especially families headed by single parents, out of poverty and onto the path to economic security. Quality child care and family supports are an investment into the future of our entire state. We owe it not only to children and parents, but to ourselves, to ensure that our youngest residents get the support they need to be happy, educated, well-adjusted, and competent Mainers. We strongly urge you to pass LD 1417. Thank you for your time.

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