

# Maine Chapter

INCORPORATED IN MAINE

American Academy of Pediatrics

DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN®



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Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer and Members of the Joint Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Andrea Tracy. I am a resident of Brunswick, a pediatrician and a member of the Maine Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics Board of Directors.

The American Academy of Pediatrics, and our Maine chapter, are dedicated to collaborating with our statewide partners to promote healthy early childhood systems of care.

Coordinated efforts across health, education, child care, and family support systems are essential to the success of raising Maine's children to not only survive, but to flourish.

For this reason, I am **speaking in support of LD 1712, An Act To Support Children's Healthy Development and School Success**, which has two important components.

First, establishing Help Maine Grow System, based on the Help Me Grow model, a model which is working well in at least 28 states, will provide a state-wide grid for access and coordination of "all things early childhood" across multiple relevant systems.

Second, First4ME Early Care and Education Program will provide funding for propelling Maine's early child care centers toward higher-quality, more comprehensive care and education.

Let me focus on the unique phenomenon of the growing brain of a very young child, and why it is so crucial to tend them well. Early experiences really matter! Brain growth in the first years of a child's life is rapid and robust, with an overabundance of neurons and synapses, sensing, testing, and processing feedback. What this growing child experiences can actually alter the structure and function of the brain. Some nerve pathways get used more and become reinforced, while other less-used pathways diminish through pruning, resulting in physical changes in the brain. More importantly, how the brain ends up after these first few years of growth, determines how that child will be at handling life and all the stressors that come with it. Positive early life experiences are actually protective, establishing the necessary foundation for healthy brain development, resilience and ultimately healthy outcomes. This is how the young brain grows and sets the trajectory for both physical and mental well-being.

When children grow in a secure, nurturing environment, with strong relationships to caretakers, and a sense of belonging in their little worlds, they develop in healthy ways.

Communities are stronger when early childhood systems work together to promote children's optimal, healthy development. When education, healthcare, family services, and early intervention programs are coordinated, families and children are more likely to access the resources they need to flourish.

On behalf of all who care for Maine's children, please vote to support this critical legislation.