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**TESTIMONY BY JIM CLAIR
CEO CSSHEALTH, CHAIR EDUCARE CENTRAL MAINE
AND MEMBER, READYNATION
BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON
HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
IN SUPPORT OF LD 1712 AN ACT TO SUPPORT CHILDREN'S HEALTHY
DEVELOPMENT AND SCHOOL SUCCESS
THURSDAY, MAY 20, 2021, 3 P.M.**

Chairs Claxton and Meyer, distinguished members of the Health and Human Services Committee, I am Jim Clair, CEO of CSS Health, Chair of Educare Central Maine and a member of the business organization ReadyNation. I was also one of the founders and former Co-Chair of the Maine Early Learning Investment Group. Most of my volunteer work in Maine for the past 10 years has been focused on early care and education of our youngest children.

There has been a great deal of public and private attention paid to Maine's child care crisis during this past year. And for good reason: the business community has learned many hard lessons during the pandemic. One of those lessons is that without reliable child care, parents can't work. That makes helping fix parents' barriers to high-quality child care a priority issue for business leaders. We all understand that. What's less understood is what we mean by "quality" child care and why it matters so much. Much of LD 1712 focuses on helping our child care sector improve its quality. It should be a priority bill this session.

There are three key elements of child care quality. First, a program's physical environment must be safe, clean and attractive to children and use materials that stimulate physical, cognitive, social and emotional development. Instruction and curriculum should be research-based. And, perhaps most importantly, the interpersonal interactions must be consistent, supportive and stimulate learning.

The heart of any early childhood care and education program is the relationship between the teacher and the child. Highly qualified early educators engage in nurturing interactions with children, supporting children's social and emotional development, and also provide developmentally-appropriate instruction in key pre-literacy, pre-math and other academic skills. Thus, early childhood educators

must be well trained, both before they start teaching and once they are on the job through continuous professional development. Adequate compensation is also key to attracting and retaining top talent.

The main driver of child-care costs is labor. Maine child care workers earn low salaries. The median wage for Maine [early educators](#) is [\\$12.89 per hour](#), which is about \$26,800 annually, compared to a [\\$55,000 median salary](#) for a Maine public school teacher (according to a 24/7 Wall St. review of federal statistics). Compensation tends to be lowest in private, community-based settings, which serve a majority of children. I know that the Maine Office of Child and Family Services has drafted a plan to begin a small wage supplement program (\$100 a month) to support child care workers using some of the recently approved federal relief monies. And, just this week your IDEA Committee colleagues approved a bill that will add incentives, such as scholarships, apprenticeships and graduated wage supplements, for child care workers to improve their training and education. These are great starts that address the child care wage issues. LD 1712 addresses the child care quality and access issues, and this is an important compliment to the wage initiatives. To truly build the “world class child care” that is envisioned in Maine’s 10-year Economic Development Plan, I urge legislators to address both pieces of this child care equation. One without the other will not lead to the outcomes we seek for Maine children and families.

Fortunately, in Maine, we have a program and model that shows us how to do this important work, and which has proven outcomes for our youngest children, their families and the workforce.

In 2015 Educare Central Maine took its best practices and model to the Skowhegan and Somerset County area, which had the highest number of [child risk factors](#) in the state. They [created Elevate Maine/Somerset, in partnership with](#) the private-sector, CEO-led [Maine Early Learning Investment Group](#), which funded provider professional development and the program’s evaluation. It began with a 2015 federal Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership grant. Child care centers and family child care providers in rural Somerset County offer increased quality birth-to-kindergarten-entry early care and education, to ensure that children enter kindergarten healthy and ready to succeed. Providers receive weekly visits that include coaching and mentoring, participate in professional development opportunities, and network with their peers. Providers also receive increased funding for resources and supplies. Parents receive education on parenting and child health and development, as well as family goal setting to support self-sufficiency. Goals of the initiative include: enhancing the quality of instruction, increasing family engagement and parent education to support child development, and providing comprehensive services (cognitive, nutritional, oral, mental and physical health).

[Elevate Maine/Somerset’s evaluation](#) affirms that children, families and early educators attain program benchmarks. Outcomes data demonstrate success: children showed increases in vocabulary and language, and in initiative and self-regulation, with enhanced attachment relationships and social and emotional well-being, and reduced negative behaviors. In addition, [100 percent](#) of parents received health and parent education. Family child care providers improved the quality of their programs’ physical space, materials and activities offered, and provider-child interactions, advancing on Maine’s Quality Rating Scale. Researcher by Economics Professor Philip Trostel at the University of Maine Orono estimates that the cumulative lifetime savings and tax benefit is [nearly five times](#) greater than the cost.

These positive results show us why high-quality child care is important today and for our future. And, most importantly, they provide us with a successful model for how this critically important work can be replicated across our state. Now is the time for state policymakers to act on this knowledge and remove the barriers that are holding back too many children, families and businesses. I encourage your support for LD 1712’s creation of additional high-quality pilot sites across Maine so more young children and

their families and child care providers can benefit from this proven programming, and start on the path for success that we all wish for each Maine child.

I urge the Committee's unanimous support for LD1712.

James A. Clair
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Chief Executive Officer, CSS Health
Member, ReadyNation

