



Maine Association for the Education of Young Children

Testimony of Heather Marden

On behalf of the Maine Association for the Education of Young Children (MaineAEYC)
before the Health and Human Services Committee in support of

L.D. 1712 “An Act To Support Children’s Healthy Development and School Readiness”

May 20th, 2021

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Health and Human Services Committee, my name is Heather Marden and I am testifying in support of LD 1712 on behalf of the Maine Association for the Education of Young Children.

MaineAEYC promotes high-quality early learning for all children, birth through age 8, by connecting practice, policy, and research. We advance a diverse, dynamic early childhood profession and support all who care for, educate, and work on behalf of young children and families.

This bill aims to improve children’s healthy development and outcomes through the coordination of resources and programming available for children and their families. This type of coordination is necessary because:

- Pre-pandemic, we had 70% of all parents of children under 6 in the workforce.
- The early years of a child’s life are especially important for later health and development. The brain develops rapidly starting before birth and continuing into early childhood. While the brain continues to develop and change into adulthood, the first 5 years are foundational for future learning, health, and life success.
- The extent of those benefits depends on the depth of quality of their experiences and early learning while neurological connections are being made.
- The cumulative lifetime fiscal savings and tax benefit to government when investing in early education and care is estimated to be 4.8 times greater than the initial cost. (Path to a Better Future, Philip Trostel, University of Maine School of Economics Professor)

Acquiring access to child care, early intervention, healthcare, child development resources can be taxing even for well-resourced families. The multiple avenues that often must be taken to access different types of programming and support can leave families lost in the shuffle and valuable opportunities can be missed.

By creating a system-based approach to child development that is designed for families to gain access to resources at both the state level and community level, we create better opportunities for children. This approach also builds partnerships tailored around a shared mission to support the optimal development of each child.



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Child care programs play a key role in these coordinated resources. Access to child care is vital for parents in the workforce. High quality child care is vital to support the healthy outcomes of children. LD 1712 provides quality improvements for child care programs as part of this system. It gives opportunities to access coaching and resources that benefit every child in their program. We have evidence-based research on the effects of high-quality early childhood education in our state as evident in our Head Start Programs. These programs have federal and state investments in their quality. Imagine a system where all child care programs could have access to quality support. LD 1712 has a commitment to increasing quality in child care programs.

Finally, when we have coordinated efforts in our communities to support children’s development, we better tailor the resources and services to meet the needs of children in that community. By bringing such a system together at the local level, it can evaluate the population served and the supports that are best utilized within the community. This is a particularly important component in a state such as Maine where communities have diverse demographics. Locally, coordinated systems can best determine how to meet the needs of their community through public-private partnerships. Data collection as part of LD 1712 will be critical in its ongoing evaluation and flexibility of making sure resources are being fully utilized and children are receiving the services and high-quality early learning experiences they deserve.

LD 1712 will create stronger early learning experiences in the lives of Maine’s children. Collaboration and partnerships will ensure that resources are accessible and equitable to children and families and ensure that there is “no wrong door” for accessing information.