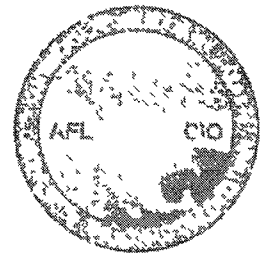


MAINE AFL-CIO

A Union of Unions Standing for Maine Workers

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Testimony of Sarah Bigney McCabe, Organizing Director of the Maine AFL-CIO, in support of LD 1726, and Act to Build Maine's Economy by Supporting Child Care and Working Families

Good morning Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Sarah Bigney McCabe, and my son Sam and I are here to ask you to support LD 1726, An Act to Build Maine's Economy by Supporting Child Care and Working Families

I am before you today wearing two hats—one as the Organizing Director of the Maine AFL-CIO, a federation of 40,000 working people across the state of Maine. But I'm also speaking here today as a parent.

I got on waiting lists for childcare when we first found out we were expecting a baby. When he was born, we still didn't have a spot. I called so many places that were all full. When my maternity leave ended, we still were on waiting lists. I had to cut back my work from full-time to part-time because we had no daycare, and my mom drove from Eddington to Skowhegan and back two days a week to take care of Sam. On Mondays, my husband and I both worked from home with the baby, alternating between Zoom meetings and getting him down for naps, and it was stressful. This went on until we finally got a spot at a wonderful daycare right around the corner from our house, and Sam started there when he was 15 months old. All told, that means we were on waiting lists for almost two years.

What are people who don't have family who can help supposed to do? What if you can't cut back to part time and still keep your job? What if you can't work from home? It was hard for us, and we had these options. It meant a cut in pay and a lot of stressful days juggling.

It should not be this hard for families like ours.

Sam loves going to D's Daycare where he is thriving with his new posse of friends and learning so much every day. It's worth every penny, but it is a huge expense for our family. Daycare costs almost as much as our mortgage payments — it's a second mortgage for many people.

I would be remiss if I neglected to point out that while childcare is one of the biggest challenges facing young families, it is far from the only one. Lack of paid family leave is another huge issue, then there was a terrible formula shortage, and I could go on and on. Raising small humans is plenty hard enough without the deck being stacked against us.

I know I'm not alone. Through my work at the Maine AFL-CIO, I get to meet with thousands of workers a year, at all different industries and occupations. I have been doing this job for over 12 years, and I have honestly never seen a single issue resonate with so many of our members. When I meet with nurses, fire fighters, ship

builders, construction workers, state employees, teachers, and basically workers from any walk of life, saying "child care" lights up the room. People are really struggling with the lack of childcare and the high expense.

We put out a survey to our members, and more people responded than I have seen on any other issue. 88.4% of people said that the high cost of childcare is a challenge. 48.6% said they are on waiting lists or can't find childcare. 60% said that the limited schedule and hours of childcare don't work with their work schedules. Large numbers also cited the distance to commute to their childcare was a problem, as well as the concern of high turnover at their childcare facilities.

I've talked to many people who applied for the state subsidy, but make just a little bit too much to qualify.

This impacts so many working families across the state, and that's why our organization has endorsed LD 1726.

I should add that our members feel deep solidarity with the childcare workers who care for their kids. We know they don't make enough to do really important work, and we wish we could pay more, but we can't even afford it now.

LD 1726 would be a gamechanger to solidify the childcare workforce by supplementing their wages and keep people in the profession, therefore making spots for more children. A lot of working-class families who make too much right now would find relief from raising the threshold for the subsidy. Please hear the cries of so many Maine families and take action to enact real solutions to the child care crisis by passing LD 1726.

Thank you.

Comments from our child care survey, each submitted a different Maine family.

"We are having to borrow money from family and not pay other bills in order to pay for childcare. We were denied assistance because we made about \$16 too much each week."

"This is forcing my wife to resign from her position and has us going from living comfortably to struggling in just weeks."

"The cost of childcare is taking away from fully meeting the needs of my family financially."

"I work part time now that I have a baby because if I worked full time and my baby was in daycare, it would be a net loss financially."

"We pay \$3k per month to put our two little ones in daycare, which puts us 1k over our budget each and every month. We are JUST above the limit for getting financial assistance, and we genuinely need it."

"Most days it feels like we are working to pay for childcare."

"It isn't worth my wife working for child care where her paycheck would go to daycare or after-school care. Forcing me to work more to make ends meet."

"My husband had to drop down to part time to watch our children when we lost our daycare. Now we can't find one to put our kids in. The wait lists are ridiculously long."

"Our income is greatly affected as I am only able to work within the daycare providers hours. It has led to me taking a job with a significant pay cut in order to make the childcare schedules for 3 children work."

"My husband and I both have full time, stable, remote jobs and yet we still are unable to find and afford childcare in central Maine. Our child (5 months old) stays home with us, which has been

equally wonderful and challenging, but it definitely takes a toll on our mental health at times. We are on five waiting lists and have been since I was 4 months pregnant.”

“There are no open infant slots within 30 minutes of our home. I left my full-time job to stay home with our baby at the end of my maternity leave because I didn't have another choice. By the time my baby was 4 months, I was losing my mind caring for her around the clock without a break. We miraculously and desperately found a spot at a center 40 mins from home (at least it's near where my husband works). Now my kids are in two different centers and it costs us over \$2,000/month. That's more than our mortgage every month. It was absolutely the right decision for us, and I will find work that will cover this (and I prefer to work than to stay home), but I have tremendous empathy for any parent who is forced to stay home because care is impossible to find. **It is breaking young families.** We were fortunate enough to find care, but the cost and logistics creates its own immense stress for us that we feel every day.”

“Both of us work full time, and have good salaries and we struggle to pay for daycare for our children. We have a 4 year old and 2 year old and pay \$590 per week for full time care so that we can work. We cannot afford for one of us to stay home because of the high cost of health insurance.”

“During the summer I often have had to pay more per month for child care/camps than I earn.”

“If I did not work a second job then the only bill I could pay is rent. The impact for us is that both of us work and the extra job takes away from us spending time as a family. Someone else is raising my kids.”

“We are unable to have childcare. So we essentially figure out a schedule that allows both of us to work, but we are then unable to see one another as partners. There is no time left for us as a family unit because I put in my 40 hours and she puts in hers and there is little to no time left to overlap, except sleep. Being an 80 hour a week family is not sustainable!”

“Not worth putting child in daycare to work because it cost more than I make.”

“We live in western Maine and are on the waitlists for all local child care. The only available spot was an hour away in North Conway for 2 days a week, 9-230. So we took it so our little one could have socialization and we could have a break. But it's almost not worth it with the drive, costs, etc.”

“We have a 2 year old and a newborn on the way. I (mother) have been home with our oldest for 1 1/2 years. I would like to go back to working (teaching) in the fall of '23, but we are struggling to find daycare. We have had our oldest on multiple daycare waitlists for over a year, and we are currently adding our expected child to waitlists and contacting more daycares. My husband is in the military which gives us access to a subsidy program, but the program is limited to certain daycare centers which all have long waitlists.”

“We have no savings, no safety net. All our money goes towards our mortgage, cars, student loans, and childcare. And that's not even full-time daycare! My parents help us on the other days. There's no way we could afford full time daycare.”

“I'm unable to work a full-time job. I've had dreams of pursuing a library science masters degree and there's no way I can do it while taking care of my daughter and son during the week. I've had to back burner my dreams for 4+ years because of COVID and the lack of affordable childcare in this area. I lean on screen time and cheap and quick meals to stay sane. It makes me feel guilty. It makes me depressed. It makes me feel like a bad mom when really I need affordable childcare.”

“Even as a stay at home mom just trying to find pre K I had to be on a waitlist for a year before I could know I got a spot for my 3 year old this fall. We CAN afford childcare, even relevantly expensive childcare but it literally is difficult to even find, period.”

"I'm struggling to find child care for my son when school is out for summer. The current rec program has a summer day camp but it is \$250 a WEEK which is very hard to afford for a single parent."

"My husband is a teacher so it falls on me to cover the childcare which means I'm missing work/my productivity decreases. Also using valuable sick/vacation time to cover childcare. Also are budget is razor thin as childcare so so expensive."

"We pay \$30k a year in childcare expenses. That's what I paid for four years of undergrad but annually."

"We only have one income due to the lack of child care. Even if we had 2 incomes one paycheck would go all to daycare."

"I can't return to work outside the home and my home business has declined with the economy."

"Our oldest is currently enrolled at a child care center. We also have an 8-month-old infant who has been on the waiting list at that center for nearly 16 months because their infant room is closed due to lack of staffing. Because of this, my spouse has had to reduce their working hours to care for her while I work, and if no spot is found soon they will need to leave the workforce altogether."

"\$14,000/annually is just a ludicrous amount of money for an average Maine family to afford."

"We are a young family with two parents working full time. We love our jobs but we barely make enough to afford childcare, even with grandparents' help. At the moment our daughter is in a daycare she loves but the only available slot was for 3 days/week and the cost is such that we are barely getting by."

'Very hard to justify working when childcare costs so much. You work 2+ days just to pay for weekly childcare.'

"We have two kids, 2 and almost 4, we both work full time and pay \$602/week for childcare which is very hard. The daycare we had our kids at initially shut down with 1 month notice at the end of 2021 and we were limited in options for a replacement and had to go with one that's very inconvenient for our home and work locations and is a long ride for the kids. The center has had to decrease the number of kids it takes because of staffing issues."

"Without grandmothers our extended family would be in a childcare crisis. Finding it is super difficult, and paying for it is also challenging."

"It is harder to find childcare than it is anything else, there have been multiple days this year alone that myself or my partner have had to call out of our job due to daycare shut downs, etc."

"I have twin daughters who are two, so it's very hard finding daycares with two openings for the same age group. I had been spending more a month on childcare than our mortgage not including any other bills or food."

"I have high student loan debt and a 1 year old child. I am unable to work enough to provide for my family along with paying all other high expenses."

'We can't afford to have both of our children in childcare and that in turn makes it so one of the parents in our household stays home full time.'

"I want my son to attend preschool but we cannot afford it. Our town, Scarborough, does not offer a free pre-k either, so we're feeling stuck with how to provide a structured setting for him where he can gain social-emotional skills, skills for working in a group, as well as skills in following adult directions. It feels very unfair."

that children in some towns are provided with this free service but we are not I would love for there to be universal preschool and pre-k access for all, especially knowing how much of a gap there is for children who attend preschool and pre-k in academic and social-emotional skills ”

“I have stepped back from my career, which lowers our household income and ability to save My partner and I literally tag team parent so I can at least keep a foot in my career for now It is stressful and unsustainable for our family ”

“We waited 6 months for a spot to open up at one of the daycares we chose I was working part time and relying on family to help us with childcare until this point Since our daughter started there in Spring of 2020 the prices have gradually increased every year and they have shortened their hours making it a big challenge to work around our work schedules ”

“Would like to both work, so we can afford high housing prices One parent is a licensed teacher (another field with labor shortage), but has to stay home because we can't find a daycare for our infant and toddler On numerous waitlists, some we have been on for over a year ”

“I got on multiple daycare waitlists when I was 1 or 2 months pregnant One spot opened up when my baby was 16 months old, and we still haven't heard from the other place over 2 years later We were able to find a temporary solution but they had limited hours and it was hard to make work for 2 working parents We now pay a staggering \$1,910 per month for child care ”

‘ We can only afford to send our kids to daycare two days a week Which means my wife works from home while caring for a very active 1 year old Luckily we have grandparents to help out, but not everyone is so lucky ”

“It's such a large portion of our income that it makes it challenging to save ”

“We will have two children in care this fall which equates to \$500/week It's impossible to find care in general so we feel fortunate to have our provider, however, that is a huge financial strain We do not qualify for ANY assistance ”

“My husband and I own a small business and have 2 kids — ages 3 and 5 The older one is now in kindergarten but the younger is in daycare The daycare we've had them both at for the last 4 years announced in January that they were closing at the end of the school year prompting a major panic and scramble Without being on waitlists for multiple years prior we had practically no hope of getting a spot in another program (thankfully we found one that uses a lottery system and literally won the lottery) I'm not sure how the issue of affordable childcare (or healthcare for that matter) is not more closely tied to the issue of supporting small businesses but the things that would help us most as small business owners are affordable childcare and affordable healthcare ”

“My entire salary plus more goes to childcare We live off of my spouse's income ”

“Childcare is a huge issue for our family's financial success Both parents work full time jobs-one being a teacher and childcare for one child is a full weeks pay ”

“I am having twins and work full time I make a decent salary, but quality childcare will take over half of my take-home pay ”

“Daycare is our biggest monthly cost by a landslide ”