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Resolve, To Direct the Maine Children's Growth Council To Study the Connections between Higher Education and Early Childhood Education

Sec. 1 Convene working group. Resolved: That the Maine Children's Growth Council, as established in the Maine Revised Statutes, Title 5, chapter 621, shall convene a working group to review and make recommendations for administrative or legislative action, or both, concerning the existing and potential connections between higher education and early childhood education, including, but not limited to, the ways in which the higher education system can support the development of the early childhood education system, the ways the early childhood education system can help strengthen the higher education system and the support needed to make this reciprocal relationship sustainable. The Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Education shall participate in the working group as well as representatives from public universities, community colleges, child care providers, Head Start and other community stakeholders that the council may identify; and be it further

Sec. 2 Charge of working group. Resolved: That the working group shall consider ideas and make recommendations, including proposing legislation, if necessary, for creating a partnership between child care providers and state institutions of higher learning that will allow for ongoing communication about the health and needs of the State's early childhood education and higher education systems; and be it further

Sec. 3 Determine opportunities for additional child care resources. Resolved: That the working group shall:

1. Analyze the federal Higher Education Act of 1965, which identifies child care as a specific example of a special circumstance for the use of what federal law and regulations refer to as "professional judgment," to determine the extent to which the use of professional judgment provides additional opportunity to increase access to child care for students in need;

2. Consult with the Maine Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators to review the current practice of financial aid officers in administering the professional judgment provisions on a case-by-case basis when determining an applicant's eligibility for federal financial aid, including the extent to which financial aid officers exercised the professional judgment provisions in 2008 as a percentage of the total number of financial aid applications for which they provided assistance; and to review the strategies recommended to financial aid officers for implementing the nonregulatory guidance provided in the United States Department of Education letters dated April 2, 2009 and May 8, 2009 regarding the use of professional judgment; and

3. Examine the extent to which existing child care resources are available for increasing educational opportunities in this State; and be it further

Sec. 4 Report. Resolved: That the working group shall provide a report to the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services with findings and recommendations, including any draft legislation necessary, no later than January 15, 2010. The joint standing committee is authorized to submit a bill related to the subject of the report to the Second Regular Session of the 124th Legislature.