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**TESTIMONY BY TRACYE FORTIN
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.**

Good Afternoon, Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Tracye Fortin and I am the Executive Director at Educare Central Maine and Chief Operating Officer of Child & Family Services at Kennebec Valley Community Action Program.

Our communities, our state and our country realize now more than ever before that childcare access and quality are paramount to a healthy economy. This was highlighted with the pandemic. This has been known to the early childhood field for years from research-based evidence, and certainly came to light - brightly - since COVID-19, for business leaders, public educators, government officials, families and children.

Since research informed us of children's brain development, with the greatest synopsis for learning capacity initiated prior to age three, Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) and the long-term impact on children's development and social-emotional well-being, and intensive parent engagement for a whole family approach for positive and lasting outcomes, early childhood programs have continued to advocate for supports to increase childcare quality and access, recognizing that it takes a village.

The research behind LD1712 is expansive; inclusive of national, state and local data. Supporting LD1712 is acknowledgement of childcare as an economic development issue as identified in our Governor's Economic Recovery Plan to sustain and grow Maine's economy. Today you hear and read testimonies from an array of stakeholders and respectable data sources. Years of study points us toward strengthening comprehensive services for children and families. We need to intentionally grow Maine's child care. We have the data. We have the model. And we have the desire of cross-sector professionals, including community providers ready to embrace this opportunity.

The Maine Early Learning Investment Group responded to the childcare access and quality need with funding to assure coaching and evaluation of a pilot model in a high need, rural community; Skowhegan, Maine. The success of this effort includes blended and braided funding sources and partnerships that have proven positive outcomes and are sustainable now, beyond the initial private investment.

- Educare's Learning Hub has a role.
- Head Start has a role.
- Community Child Care Providers (most are Family Childcare and all have remained open) have a role.
- Maine Roads to Quality's Professional Development System has a role.
- Maine Office of Child & Family Services Child Care Subsidy Program has a role.
- Department of Education has a role.
- Maine Children's Alliance has a role.
- Parent Ambassadors have a role.
- Businesses have a role.

LD1712 outlines the tenants of a partnership model to support community childcare providers in their business and connects systems, including funding streams. Maine's early childhood systems have made great strides to work together in collaboration. We – collectively – are ready! But more funding and shared leadership across each entity creates a stronger system. Expanding the Skowhegan model to other 'ready communities' in Maine is a positive step forward to meet multiple state goals identified by Maine's Departments of Health and Human Services, Education, and Labor, for example. Each community across Maine has both similarities and differences. That is why LD1712 emphasizes a system as well as a partnership framework to advance access to high quality early care and education in Maine.

What an opportunity we have with LD1712! I urge you to support investing in Maine's movement forward, joining in the significant systems partnerships that are established, and ready to be strengthened and expanded.

Thank you for your time.

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