



May 21, 2021

Dear Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services,

My name is Casey Faulkingham. I grew up in Aroostook County and I currently reside in Hampden.

I join you today on behalf of the Maine Women's Lobby, where I am completing my final field placement as I pursue my Masters of Social Work at the University of Maine. For over forty years, the Maine Women's Lobby has advocated for public policy which increases the health, wellness, safety, and economic security of Maine women and girls, with a focus on the most marginalized populations and communities.

We write today **in support of LD 1712, "An Act To Support Children's Healthy Development and School Success."** We thank President Jackson for sponsoring this bill.

Before I came to the Maine Women's Lobby, for ten years I served as an advocate and educator at two domestic violence resource centers in Maine. Much of my work was focused on supporting young children and their single mothers in finding safety and healing from abuse and trauma. I have seen firsthand how the siloed nature of behavioral healthcare and mental health services leave children and their mothers/parents, especially those with limited resources, feeling vulnerable and alone.

What I've learned over the past decade in the field, is that the most pressing problems facing women in Maine are incredibly complex and nuanced: the challenges before us are related to both economics *and* health; safety *and* education; individual family needs *and* available community resources. Because these issues are complex, they require solutions that are comprehensive, innovative, and include all the partners at the table. LD 1712 is exactly the kind of holistic, systemic solution we need today.

We know that high quality healthcare is harder to find than ever; Maine's early education workforce needs support and expansion; and access to childcare supports economic opportunity for working families. **We also know that affordable childcare is inextricably linked with the economic security of women.** For example:

- Almost 70 percent of mothers are in the labor force, and about 42 percent of mothers overall are the sole or primary breadwinners in their homes.¹
- Black and Latinx mothers work at even higher rates than white mothers and are more likely to be the primary breadwinner in their households than white mothers (71 % of

¹ National Women's Law Center, "A Snapshot of Working Mothers" (Washington: 2017), available at <https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/A-Snapshot-of-Working-Mothers.pdf>



black mothers are the primary breadwinners for their families).² Additionally, mothers of color report significantly increased challenges to finding adequate childcare – and the average cost of childcare for two is about 42% of the median income for Black mothers.³

- Over a 15-year period, women who took just one year off work had earnings that were 40 percent lower than women who did not.⁴
- Inability to find childcare significantly decreases a mother's ability to access employment, especially for families headed by single mothers.

Furthermore, children are less likely to experience abuse or neglect when families have access to safe, positive childcare and support to practice nurturing parenting skills.⁵ LD 1712 includes consistent support not only for the child, but the whole family unit, including wrap-around home services and parenting coaches.

LD 1712 is a comprehensive approach that seeks to solve these interconnected challenges with an interconnected solution that includes: supports for workforce development, increased access to screening and care, and an interdisciplinary support system for working families. By addressing these complex challenges holistically, we have a greater chance of addressing child poverty, stagnating wages, and educational gaps for working families, and those are solutions we can all support.

We urge you to vote 'yes' on LD 1712.

Sincerely,

Destie Hohman Sprague, Executive Director
Maine Women's Lobby / mainewomen.org

Casey Faulkingham, MSW Intern
Maine Women's Lobby / mainewomen.org

² Sarah Jane Glynn, "Breadwinning Mothers Are Increasingly the U.S. Norm" (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2016), available at

<https://cdn.americanprogress.org/content/uploads/2016/12/19065819/Breadwinners-report.pdf>.

³ Steven Jessen-Howard and others, "Understanding Infant and Toddler Child Care Deserts" (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2018), available at

<https://cdn.americanprogress.org/content/uploads/2018/10/31064929/IT-ChildCare-Deserts-13.pdf>.

⁴ Stephen J. Rose and Heidi I. Hartmann, "Still a Man's Labor Market: The Slowly Narrowing Gender Wage Gap" (Washington: Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2018), available at http://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/C474_IWPR-Still-a-Mans-Labor-Market-update-2018-1.pdf.

⁵ <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childabuseandneglect/riskprotectivefactors.html>