



Maine Forest Products Council

The voice of Maine's forest economy

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Cross Insurance
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Farm Credit East
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Huber Resources
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Testimony in Support of LD 890

“An Act to Create the Child Care Provider Student Loan Repayment Fund”

March 21, 2023

Krysta West, Deputy Director

Good afternoon, Senator Curry, Representative Roberts and members of the Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business. I'm Krysta West, the Deputy Director of the Maine Forest Products Council. On behalf of the Council, I am submitting testimony today in support of LD 890, “An Act to Create the Child Care Provider Student Loan Repayment Fund.”

Last fall, the Council took a simple poll of our members and quickly found that one of the greatest barriers to the forest products industry at this time is the lack of available workforce. This issue is particularly challenging for rural businesses where the services required to support a robust workforce are lacking.

Without safe, affordable and local options, parents are faced with the tough choice of securing employment and picking up shifts or caring for children. Unfortunately, these challenges have only become tougher since the pandemic caused a significant number of facilities to permanently close and providers to leave the industry. I can attest firsthand that even right here in the City of Augusta, lengthy wait lists are common for childcare services, especially for infants and toddlers.

As a result, some larger employers within the industry have started taking a proactive approach and are working to open new facilities in underserved communities or secure spaces at existing daycare providers. To support this trend, and hopefully enable more employers to address this pressing issue, the Council has joined a diverse coalition this session supporting a bipartisan bill induced by Senator Trey Stewart, LD 1222, “An Act to Expand Child Care Services Through an Employer-supported Tax Credit.”

While it is said that if you build it, they will come, these efforts don't address one factor that has driven the daycare shortage, and that is the lack of childcare providers. We view LD 890 as potentially a useful tool to recruit new providers to the childcare industry in underserved areas of the state.

For these reasons, the Maine Forest Products Council urges your support of LD 890. Thank you for your consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions the committee may have.