



Maine Forest Products Council

The voice of Maine's forest economy

Companies represented on the MFPC Board

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American Forest Mgmt.
Baskahegan Co.
BBC Land, LLC
Columbia Forest Prod.
Cross Insurance
Family Forestry
Farm Credit East
Fontaine Inc.
H.C. Haynes
Huber Resources
INRS
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Katahdin Forest Mgmt.
Key Bank
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LandVest Inc.
Louisiana Pacific
Maibec Logging
ND Paper
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Pingree Associates
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ReEnergy
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Robbins Lumber
Sappi North America
Southern Maine Forestry
Stead Timberlands
St. Croix Tissue
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Timber Resource Group
Timberstate G.
Wadsworth Woodlands
Wagner Forest Mgt.
Weyerhaeuser
Woodland Pulp

Testimony in Support of LD 1726

“An Act to Build Maine’s Economy by Supporting Child Care for Working Families”

May 10, 2023

Krysta West, Deputy Director

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and members of the Committee on Health and Human Services Committee, my name is Krysta West, I am a resident of Readfield and I am testifying today on behalf of the Maine forest Products Council in support of LD 1726, “An Act to Build Maine’s Economy by Supporting Child Care for Working Families.”

I apologize that I am unable to deliver this testimony in person today, as I am very quickly nearing my due date. As a mother with another little one on the way, I am all too familiar with the barriers to obtaining safe, affordable child care. As a matter of fact, when I discovered that we would be welcoming a new child into our family, I informed my child care provider before I had a chance to even speak with my husband because I knew that in order to obtain a slot in Augusta, I would need at least 9 months of notice to ensure a seamless transition back into the workforce.

Members of the forest products industry, who the Council represents, have also felt the impacts of child care shortages, and have identified it as a leading barrier to retaining workforce, especially in some of the more rural areas where they operate. Without safe, local options, parents are faced with the tough choice of securing employment and picking up shifts or caring for children, which is why the Council has taken a strong interest in measures to increase access to affordable child care this session. To my knowledge, this is the first session the Council has made this issue a priority, but it has risen to crisis level in the wake of the pandemic.

These challenges are not unique to our industry or state. According to [a recent report by Ready Nation](#), the child care shortage is costing the United States \$122 billion in lost earnings, productivity and revenue each year. The report also found that 85% of parents indicated that problems with child care hurt their work effort or their time availability for work. Twenty percent of those surveyed reported they had to exit the labor market due to child care challenges and more than 1/3 reported that inadequate child care capacity restricts their career options, causing them to turn down important opportunities such as job offers, education or work-related training.

Some larger employers within the forest industry are taking a proactive approach and are working to open new facilities in underserved communities or secure spaces with existing daycare providers. To support this trend, we are working on a meaningful tax credit to enable employers of all sizes to support working families and help create additional slots (LD 1222).

There is some concern, however, that even if we are able to build facilities, secure more slots in underserved communities and offset part of the cost for our workforce, we will still struggle to obtain enough child care providers to fully realize the return on our investments. Child care as a profession ranks in the bottom 2% of earners, despite training, credentials and degrees that are required for this field. An estimated 1,100 child care educators are needed just to meet the current licensed capacity. For this reason, we have joined a coalition to support this bill (LD 1726) as well. As drafted, this bill accomplishes a number of important goals, but importantly to us, it will double the monthly wage supplement for child care educators. This is necessary to make these positions more competitive with K-12 education without further burdening parents with child care costs that can be prohibitive.

As an industry, we are very interested in working proactively with your support to find solutions to address the child care crisis because it is having a real impact on workforce availability and participation. In order for our industry and all sectors of Maine's economy to thrive, we must collectively tackle these issues head-on. For these reasons, **please support LD 1726 (and hopefully, LD 1222 if it advances to the floor).**

Thank you for your consideration.