

STATE OF MAINE

In House _____

WHEREAS, science shows that early childhood experiences matter and a child's brain grows faster during the first years than at any later time in life, with more than a million new brain connections forming each second, strengthening cognitive and social-emotional capacities that prepare children for success in kindergarten to grade 12 and beyond; and

WHEREAS, Maine is one of 4 states where deaths outnumber births, and the declining number of births has implications for our cities, towns, schools and economy; and

WHEREAS, providing every infant with the opportunity for a positive early childhood experience is critical for Maine's future success; and

WHEREAS, it is critical to have a robust early childhood system, including care, education and child welfare, to support and strengthen families experiencing challenges and crises and to develop protective factors such as positive attachments and relationships; and

WHEREAS, a robust early childhood system will give adults the tools they need and support strong and resilient children in Maine; and

WHEREAS, 2021 set a new child death record in Maine, and the Child Welfare Services Ombudsman's annual report concludes that there continue to be struggles with practice issues and decision making regarding child welfare services, including deciding whether or not the child is safe during the initial investigation and whether the child will be safe in the home once reunified with the parents; and

WHEREAS, to achieve equitable care in early childhood, the State must focus on the early childhood environment, including child welfare, early learning, healthy development, poverty, systemic racism and disparities in access to resources and opportunities; and

WHEREAS, Maine can produce better early childhood and economic development results and improve community and family well-being with approaches that focus on state and regional coordination, integrated funding, multigenerational strategies, "no wrong door" access to services, comprehensive data analysis and continuous quality improvement and engagement with stakeholders that drives policy change; and

WHEREAS, it is essential that the Legislature work with the State's education, child welfare and early childhood community and workforce, as well as with policy experts, to develop and implement measures to strengthen the State's early childhood system; now, therefore, be it

ORDERED, the Senate concurring, that the Task Force on Early Childhood in Maine, referred to in this order as "the task force," is established as follows.

1. Appointments; composition. The task force consists of members appointed as follows:

A. Four members of the Senate, appointed by the President of the Senate, including 2 members of the party holding the largest number of seats in the Senate and 2 members of the party holding the 2nd largest number of seats in the Senate; and

B. Four members of the House of Representatives, appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives, including 2 members of the party holding the largest number of seats in the House and 2 members of the party holding the 2nd largest number of seats in the House.

2. Chairs. The first-named Senator is the Senate chair of the task force and the first-named member of the House of Representatives is the House chair of the task force. Notwithstanding Joint Rule 353, the chairs may invite the participation of, as nonvoting members, early childhood leaders, policy experts and individuals who represent the interests of or who work directly in early childhood fields. Any additional members invited pursuant to this section are not entitled to compensation or reimbursement under section 5.

3. Appointments; convening. All appointments must be made no later than 15 days following passage of this order. The appointing and inviting authorities shall notify the Executive Director of the Legislative Council once all appointments and invitations have been made. When the appointment and invitation of all members has been completed, the chairs of the task force shall call and convene the first meeting of the task force. If 15 days or more after the passage of this order a majority of but not all appointments and invitations have been made, the chairs may request authority and the Legislative Council may grant authority for the task force to meet and conduct its business.

4. Duties. The task force shall review ways to strengthen the State's early childhood environment, with a focus on early childhood education, family and child welfare and children's healthy development, including their physical, emotional, mental and behavioral health. The task force shall focus on strategies to define and coordinate leadership, integrate funding with strategic financing, improve equity and address racial disparities in early childhood and align local, regional and state initiatives. The task force shall recommend how to support system policies that drive continuous improvement in quality and delivery of services, that engage parents, educators, providers and others as part of system development and refinement and that use comprehensive data analysis to track progress on outcomes, assessments and benchmarks.

5. Compensation. The legislative members of the task force are entitled to receive the legislative per diem, as defined in the Maine Revised Statutes, Title 3, section 2, and reimbursement for travel and other necessary expenses related to their attendance at authorized meetings of the task force.

6. Quorum. A quorum is a majority of the members of the task force, including those members invited to participate who have accepted the invitation to participate.

7. Staffing. The Legislative Council may provide staffing support to the task force when the Legislature is not in session. The Legislative Council shall contract for necessary staff support for the task force during the legislative session and may contract for such staff support for a longer period to the extent needed and if sufficient funding is available. Notwithstanding Joint Rule 353, at the request of the task force, the Legislative Council may provide drafting assistance to the task force during the legislative session.

8. Reports. The task force may submit an initial report, including suggested legislation, no later than August 1, 2022. The task force shall submit a final report that includes its findings and recommendations, including suggested legislation, for introduction to the First Regular Session of the 131st Legislature.

SPONSORED BY: _____

(Representative MILLETT, R.)

TOWN: Cape Elizabeth