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Testimony of Sarah Farrell before
the Committee on Health and Human Services
in support of
**LD 1726: An Act to Build Maine's Economy by Supporting Child Care
for Working Families**
May 10, 2023

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Sarah Farrell and I'm the Director of Operations at the Central Lincoln County YMCA in Damariscotta. I support LD 1726: *An Act to Build Maine's Economy by Supporting Child Care for Working Families*.

Collectively, the 15 YMCAs in Maine are the largest childcare provider in the state. We serve thousands of children in our early childhood education programs, before/after school programs, and summer camp. These programs provide children with safe, nurturing and enriching care, and are a critical component of our state's infrastructure to support working parents and our economy.

There are a couple components of this bill in particular that I want to highlight as impactful for my YMCA.

- 1) Improvements to the childcare subsidy program:** The shift from attendance-based to enrollment-based reimbursement for childcare subsidy is an important step in making this critical program work for families and providers. Enrollment-based reimbursement is a more stable and sustainable funding mechanism for providers, meaning we will be better equipped to meet the needs of our communities. We also support policies that allow more families in need to access this support.

Our Y can serve many families with subsidy. This gives children access to quality care and a best start in life. Our Y loses money when children on subsidy don't attend, due to an illness, appointment, or vacation. We have to hold that slot for that child regardless of whether or not they attend, so there is no way for us to recoup those losses. This reimbursement is administratively and financially burdensome for providers and directly impacts our ability to serve low-moderate income families.

- 2) Doubling the monthly wage supplement for all childcare workers** is a critical investment in our most important asset – the skilled early educators that teach our state's children and allow us to offer consistent care for working families. Recruiting and retaining qualified staff has been an incredible challenge for us, and impacts the number of children we can serve.

The salary supplement has helped with staffing and retention, but we are in desperate need of more investment in our educators. Childcare is hard and skilled work, and we must compensate these professionals appropriately or we will never be able to meet the community demand for care.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah Farrell – Central Lincoln County YMCA

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