



Testimony of Katie Soucy on behalf of Starting Strong

In support of LD 2199 An Act to Ensure Subsidy Reimbursements and Emergency Financial Assistance for Certain Child Care Providers

Distinguished members of the Health and Human Services Committee, my name is Katie Soucy and I am the director of a coalition of organizations in Portland called Starting Strong. Starting Strong works to improve outcomes for children and families in our local community. I am here today to testify in favor of LD 2199.

Since 2018, Starting Strong has focused our efforts on increasing access to high quality early childhood care and education as a key strategy towards supporting the overall success of young children, their families and our community. Our commitment to ensuring that children and families receive high quality child care and early childhood education is based on mountains of research which points to the positive long-term success of such programming on both individuals and communities and the significant gaps which exist in Portland.

As a local coalition, we know that the child care crisis is a real problem which not only plagues families, but also impacts employers, social service providers, K -12 educators, and more. As I am sure you know, solving the current child care crisis is complex and will include several key policy solutions. I am here today to emphasize the need to strengthen the Child Care Affordability Program and pay subsidy rates based on a child's enrollment in a program.

Currently, if a child enrolled in CCAP is out sick for any reason, their child care provider is not paid. This unpredictable situation wrecks havoc on providers that are also small businesses or nonprofits operating on slim margins. In Maine, estimates indicate that child care providers are losing nearly \$5 million dollars a year in missed CCAP payments due to child absences. This significant loss dissuades child care providers from participating in the Child Care Affordability Program thus limiting access for working families. Prevailing practices for "private pay" families are based on student enrollment, not attendance. (I.E. if a child is absent, their parents or caregivers are still required to pay for their child's slot during their absence.)

So much has been done in recent years to support access to child care and we are truly grateful for the significant efforts of Maine's legislature. Your dedication to the children and families of Maine is noticed and invaluable. Unfortunately, our current crisis was not created overnight and remains a significant barrier to our state's future prosperity. Last year, Maine child care programs served an

estimated 9,500 fewer children than they were licensed to. Many programs can not afford the revenue losses that come with participating in the Child Care Affordability Program. We hear this first hand in Portland, where the cost of high quality care exceeds current subsidy payments. LD2199 would help to alleviate this difference and encourage more providers to participate in CCAP.

Strengthening the Child Care Affordability Program in Maine is key to expanding access for families and getting more parents and caregivers in the workforce. Thank you to President Jackson for your continued efforts to support children and families in Maine and this critically important industry. And, to this committee for your consideration of it here today.