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FOR HEALTHY LIVING
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Testimony of Ann Tikkanen, CEO, Mount Desert Island YMCA, before
the Committee on Health and Human Services
in support of

**LD 2199: An Act To Ensure Subsidy Reimbursements And Emergency Financial Assistance For
Certain Child Care Providers**

February 20, 2024

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Ann Tikkanen and I'm the Chief Executive Officer of a small and rural YMCA, on Mount Desert Island, for which we are licensed to serve 50 children, from working families who live and work on the island. I support LD 2199: *An Act To Ensure Subsidy Reimbursements And Emergency Financial Assistance For Certain Child Care Providers*.

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.

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.

The Enrollment-Based Reimbursement System is simply stated, a better payment method for the following reasons:

- For Ys and all childcare providers: With enrollment-based reimbursement funding, income is more predictable and stable, considering also what it takes to more substantially cover the costs to ensure uninterrupted and reliable childcare for the children of working families.
- For working families: Particularly for families experiencing the most economic hardship, a change to an enrollment-based payment system avoids the today built-in financial disincentive. On Mount Desert Island, we would never want to drop or reduce childcare services for challenged families in response to, for example, low-wage workers subject to unpredictable and unstable work schedules, or a child's attendance and absences due to illnesses, medical appointments, or simply family vacations.

Regarding Emergency Financial Assistance, this bill also establishes an emergency fund to help Ys and all childcare providers meet an urgent need to support their operations and continue serving families. On Mount Desert Island, demand for affordable childcare is more than what all island providers can staff for, meaning, recruiting for trained professional staff is difficult given the rural and remote location, and difficulty in finding housing. Emergency financial assistance could allow nearly all providers an additional measure of assurance that funds are in place to retain the existing childcare workers, and help where need be with basic operational costs, and avoid childcare classroom closures, which would leave even more families without childcare.

The needed emergency financial assistance is a lifeline. Please help us keep all childcare programs staffed.

Respectfully submitted,

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Chief Executive Officer
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The mission of the Mount Desert Island YMCA is to develop community, character, personal growth in wellness and spirit, mind and body for the greater Mount Desert Island community.