

Testimony by Augusta Assistant Town Manager and former Chief of Police Jared Mills  
in support of LD 2199 "An Act to Ensure Subsidy Reimbursements and Emergency  
Financial Assistance for Certain Child Care Providers"

Tuesday, February 20, 2024 3:10 p.m. Room 209 Cross State Office Building

Chairs Baldacci and Meyer, and distinguished members of the Health and Human Services Committees, I am Jared Mills, former Chief of Police and now Assistant City Manager in Augusta. I am also a Past President of the Maine Chiefs of Police Association and a member of the anti-crime group FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS, which is made up of 140 Maine law enforcement leaders.

As Augusta's Assistant City Manager, I have the honor of helping to oversee all of Augusta's programs, one of which is a child care program for 5 to 12-year-olds. I am proud of our program, which has been operating for 29 years and serves 100-120 kids daily, some of whom are children of our city workers, as well as other children in our community. It is my honor to submit this written testimony in support for important changes in Maine's child care system.

First, as I have done several times before this and other legislative committees, I would like to offer a unique perspective on high-quality early learning – its impact on crime.

Before retiring from my 25 years in law enforcement last fall, I witnessed too many cases in which the lack of properly-supervised activities led kids into crime-ridden environments.

Government's most fundamental responsibility is to protect the public safety. That's what law enforcement does every day. But once a crime has been committed, lives have already been shattered. Those of us on the front line in the fight against crime understand that we will never fix the crime problem solely through arrests and imprisonment. We can save lives, hardship – and money – by investing in programs that can keep children from growing up to ever become involved in crime.

High-quality early learning programs are a great crime-reduction strategy. This is backed up by a lot of research, including the 30-year study of the Chicago Child-Parents Centers and a more recent MIT study of the Boston preschool program.

So, investing in quality child care is a solid community safety strategy.

Now, I would like to add how important it is that we support child care programs across our state, whose workers take care of children so parents can work. They are the workforce behind the workforce in Maine. Like many across the state, Augusta's child care stayed open all

**MAINE**

through the pandemic, even when schools closed, serving families of first responders, medical professionals, and many other who would not have been able to go to work without reliable child care for their children. I can attest to the fact that the child care providers are some of our hardest workers, in spite of their low wages. I applaud this Committee and the Maine Legislature's work last year to increase the wage supplement program for child care providers, as well as implement other important improvement measures. Thank you. These are major steps in the right direction to strengthen our vital child care industry.

But more needs to be done, as proposed in LD 2199.

One part of this bill proposes to fix the way in which providers are reimbursed for child care subsidies for lower-income working parents, so that providers are paid based on *enrollment*, rather than attendance. These subsidies come to Maine through the federal Child Care Development Block grant, and currently providers are reimbursed based on a child's attendance. Yet, even when a given child may be out sick or out for any reason, the program still needs to operate to care for all the other children. There are fixed overhead costs, such as rent, insurance, and other expenses. Please think about how that would work in our public schools if teachers' salaries had to be adjusted based on the number of children in their classroom each day. As an administrator, I cannot imagine how hard this is to track, run, and manage. I would think that there would be administrative cost savings, perhaps substantial savings, based on eliminating the need to routinely adjust the subsidy payments to track when children are absent.

Programs lose money every year based on this formula. I would like to share with this Committee data from the City of Augusta's Child Care Program Director when I asked her what the cost of payment from the state based on attendance, not enrollment, are. Here is her response:

*Based on SCHOOL YEAR childcare:*

- *If we were to be paid based on enrollment, child care would receive \$5,000 weekly x 39 weeks of school year childcare*
- *Currently we are paid based on attendance (broken down hourly), child care on average receives \$3,240 weekly x 39 weeks of school year childcare*
- *The cost difference for SCHOOL YEAR child care alone would be a potential \$68,640 if we were to be funded by enrollment vs. attendance.*
- *In comparison, that potential income alone would more than pay for all transportation needs for child care for a full year (summer trips & school year). It would be HUGELY beneficial to receive subsidized funds based on enrollment instead of hourly attendance.*



## MAINE

LD 2199 also creates a program to allow the Department of Health and Human Services to provide short-term, one-time emergency financial assistance to cover emergency facility or operational costs. And any financial assistance given would be backed up with technical assistance to support providers' financial planning and stability. To me, this appears to be a wise move given the very thin financial margins child care programs operate on, and the fact that not all child care programs, like the City of Augusta's, have the structure and support of being part of a larger organization that can often help them weather unforeseen emergencies.

The last thing our economy needs right now is to lose more child care programs, thus taking more working parents out of our current workforce. Both provisions in this bill seek to address this issue, to further stabilize our still-fragile child care sector.

For these reasons, I am pleased to testify in support of LD 2199 and urge the Committee's unanimous support of this proposal. Thank you for your consideration.