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**Testimony of Senate President Mattie Daughtry in support of  
LD 1414, "An Act to Support and Sustain Maine's Child Care Workforce."  
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services  
January 21, 2026**

Good afternoon, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is Mattie Daughtry and I serve as President of the Maine Senate, proudly representing Senate District 23, including Brunswick, Freeport, Harpswell, Pownal, Chebeague Island, and part of Yarmouth. I am honored to present LD 1414, "An Act to Support and Sustain Maine's Child Care Workforce." This bill is in direct response to what I heard and witnessed firsthand while on my Support Kids, Support Maine statewide Child Care Listening Tour.

This summer and fall, we traveled across the state to learn what's working and what isn't in Maine's child care system. My team and I visited 11 early childhood programs across six counties, including in-home family child care programs, Head Start classrooms, nonprofit and center-based programs, and innovative intergenerational models. In addition to those visits, nearly 200 parents and educators shared their experiences through our statewide survey and virtual listening sessions. While there was real optimism about recent legislative investments, there was also a clear and consistent message: our child care workforce remains stretched thin, under-supported, and at risk of collapse without sustained action.

One of the most urgent needs we heard about—across geography, program type, and income level—was the crisis in infant and toddler care. Providers were candid that caring for our youngest Maine children is the most expensive, labor intensive part of their operation, and yet it is often the least financially viable. In rural communities and child care deserts in particular, families are waiting months or even years for infant slots, and some programs have stopped serving infants entirely because the math simply doesn't work.

As we developed this legislation, I worked closely with early educators, advocates, and members of this committee to balance what we heard on the tour with what would be most immediately helpful and administratively workable for providers. Based on that feedback I am bringing forward an amendment to LD 1414.

In the interest of supporting the child care community in the manner most efficient for them, I have worked with the committee to amend the text provided. This change will strike Sections 1 and 2. In their place, will be language that increases the existing Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) base rate bump for infant and toddler care from 10 percent to 20 percent. This change targets funding where

costs are highest and access is most limited, helping programs cover the true cost of care for our youngest children while supporting families who rely on CCAP to stay in the workforce.

Throughout the tour, we also heard repeatedly from programs serving parents who work nontraditional hours—including health care workers, hospitality employees, and manufacturing staff. Throughout the Child Care Listening Tour Survey, parents described the challenges of finding care that aligns with their work schedules. These families often have the least flexibility and the fewest child care options, yet they are essential to our local economies and communities.

At the same time, child care providers reminded us that they themselves are small business owners, navigating razor-thin margins while trying to do right by their staff and families. Center directors talked candidly about the complexity of business planning—especially when considering expansion into off-hours care. Even when the demand is there, the upfront costs, staffing challenges, and financial risk can make these transitions nearly impossible without targeted support.

That is why LD 1414 also establishes a grant program to help child care providers plan and transition toward off-hours care. This program is designed to support directors with the technical assistance and resources needed to make thoughtful, sustainable decisions — not just to expand care to be more inclusive of different work fields, but to do so in a community driven way that truly protects the quality and workforce stability of centers. Child care that matches the twenty-four hour work schedule is an absolute necessity for our hospitality, industry, and medical fields and this bill and grant program aim to help child care center directors navigate the complicated business planning that goes into transitioning to include off hours care.

I want to be clear: none of this work happens without the dedication of early childhood educators and advocates across the state. Programs like Head Start, intergenerational centers, and community based providers are holding our system together through creativity, resilience, and sheer commitment — often at personal cost. CCAP remains one of the most critical tools we have to ensure access, equity, and workforce participation. Strengthening it is foundational to any long-term solution, and the focus of another bill that I look forward to presenting to this committee later this session.

If the committee will indulge me for a moment—because this work is deeply interconnected—I also want to highlight the importance of LD 2066, sponsored by Senator Ingwersen, the chair of this committee. His bill recognizes a simple but powerful truth we heard again and again on the listening tour: early educators cannot afford to work in the very system they sustain. By establishing the Child Care Employment Award, LD 2066 would provide child care subsidies directly to licensed child care facilities and family child care providers on behalf of their employees, ensuring educators can access affordable care for their own children while remaining in the workforce. The bill also makes thoughtful investments in program administration and long-term sustainability. Together, LD 2066 and LD 1414 reflect a shared commitment to stabilizing the workforce, reducing turnover, and honoring early educators as both professionals and parents.

As I mentioned, I have worked directly with the early educator community in developing this bill, Members of the Right from the Start Coalition and educators I met on my child care listening tour will be testifying in support today and will be able to speak in more detail to the on-the-ground impacts and implementation considerations, as well as answer any questions that I may not be able to. I truly appreciate the committee's time and thoughtful consideration and I urge you to support LD 1414 as amended.

Thank you.