

Anne Gass
Gray
LD 1414

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, Members of the Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Anne Gass and I am a member of Maine's Permanent Commission on the Status of Women (PCSW).

Through the outreach and data analysis we have done over the last several years we know how critical childcare is for Maine families and our workforce. Infant and childcare is scarce, and when it is available it can be so expensive that people can't afford it, even as they must work in order to pay their rent, mortgage, food, transportation, health care, and other expenses.

For a number of years I've served on the Gray Town Council. Through our Recreation Department we offer before and after school childcare, as well as programming during school vacations. During the pandemic we heard from many families, especially from those who were considered essential workers, how critical our childcare programming was for them. We managed to keep our program going even as other programs shut down, most for a short period and a few permanently.

Quality childcare is a public good, like roads, bridges, education, and many other things. It's ironic that the Big Beautiful Bill passed last year requires Medicaid recipients to work, but does little to expand the availability-and affordability-of childcare. How can parents with limit incomes work when they have no safe, affordable place to care for their young children during their workday? And it's even worse for those who work at night.

Childcare providers are among the lowest paid employees, often paid so poorly that they themselves qualify for public assistance. We MUST do better at supporting childcare providers and LD 1414 is a step in the right direction by providing subsidies to incentivize the offering of infant and toddler care, which is the most scarce and the most in demand.

I urge you to support both LD 1414 "An Act to Support and Sustain Maine's Child Care Workforce" and LD 2066 "An Act to Establish the Child Care Employment Award." Thanks you for your attention.