

Testimony in Support of LD 2066 — An Act to Establish the Child Care Employment Award

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

Wednesday 1/21/2026

Dear Distinguished members of the Health and Human Services Committee,

My name is Melissa Harding. I am a parent to four amazing children and we live in the very rural town of Jackson, ME and I strongly support LD 2066 to establish the Child Care Employment Award. As parents we rely on licensed child care so we can work. I have seen firsthand how critical stable, affordable child care is — not only for families like mine, but for the dedicated educators who care for our children every day. Child care educators are responsible for our children's safety, learning, and early development, yet they are among the lowest-paid workers in Maine. Too often those same educators must choose between staying in the profession they love and being able to afford care for their own children. This bill addresses that exact barrier. By providing targeted employment awards to child care staff, LD 2066 helps retain experienced, qualified educators in licensed programs, which directly benefits families' access to consistent, high-quality care.

Key data and points I ask you to consider:

- The Employment Award is a proven workforce retention strategy that reduces turnover and supports program stability.
- One of the top reasons educators leave the field is the inability to afford child care for their own children; this bill addresses that root cause.
- As of September 2025 the program already supports 511 children from 313 working families, enabling hundreds of child care educators to remain employed in licensed programs because they can afford care for their own children.
- Stable staff improves child outcomes, reduces disruptions for families, and lowers recruitment and training costs for providers.
- Investing in the child care workforce is an investment in Maine's economy: it enables parents to work, supports children's development, and strengthens businesses that depend on reliable employees.

For the wellbeing of Maine's children, the economic stability of families, and the sustainability of our child care system, please vote YES on LD 2066.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Melissa Harding, Mama of four

Maine State Parent Ambassadors