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January 21, 2026

Senator Ingwersen, Chair
Representative Meyer, Chair
Members, Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333-0100

Re: LD 2066 – *An Act to Establish the Child Care Employment Award*

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide information neither for nor against LD 2066, *An Act to Establish the Child Care Employment Award*.

This bill would permanently establish the Child Care Employment Award pilot program to provide child care subsidies to individuals employed by licensed child care providers and whose child is attending care from such providers. The bill authorizes OCFS to create routine technical rules regarding the Child Care Employment Award, includes a position to administer and oversee the award, and includes \$3 million in funding for the program.

The pilot of the Child Care Employment Award has had a positive impact on the recruitment and retention of the child care workforce. OCFS engaged the Center for Early Learning Funding Equity (CELFE) to evaluate the implementation of the pilot (which was launched in July 2024 with \$5 million in funding appropriated by the Legislature for a two-year pilot). You received this report on January 14, 2026. During the course of the pilot, the program served between 500 and 700 children from 300-375 families at any one time. Interestingly, it was noted that the majority of applicants (62% as of September 2025) qualified for CCAP (as their family income was less than 125% of the State Median Income). CELFE conducted focus groups with those receiving the award and the results of those focus groups suggested that the program has had a positive impact on workforce retention. Nearly all those who received the award reported they had considered leaving the field prior to receiving the award but that the pilot had enabled them to remain in their roles. Participants also noted the benefit of having their children cared for within their workplace and data indicated that the share of children receiving care at their parents' place of work increased from 72% to 78%.

Despite the overall positive results from this program OCFS also recognizes that LD 2066 includes a significant amount of funding and the need for additional staffing to support and sustain the work. OCFS stands ready to administer the program if the funding is allocated by the Legislature but would also remind the Committee that the Child Care Affordability Program

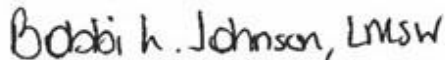
(CCAP) is currently operating on a waitlist that is significantly impacting families who qualify for support but are not able to access it due to the waitlist. In turn, there is an impact to all employers statewide whose potential employees cannot access the care that would enable them to work. In addition, since the Child Care Employment Award is connected to CCAP (eligible parents apply to CCAP first), the CCAP waitlist impacts the implementation of the Child Care Employment Award.

OCFS agrees that support for early care and education professionals is of the utmost importance. They are the heart of Maine's ability to expand the accessibility and quality of early care and education statewide. Their value and importance cannot be understated, which is reinforced by the significant investment of general funds into programs like the Child Care Employment Award Pilot and the Early Childhood Educator Workforce Salary Supplement program. A hallmark of OCFS' work to support and expand the accessibility and quality for early care and education programs in the state has been a multifaceted approach to address various areas of need within the system. LD 2066 would make an investment in one approach, something that must be weighed against the overall picture of the system, particularly in light of the current waiting list of eligible families who are not able to access the Child Care Affordability Program.

OCFS appreciates the opportunity to provide this information.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions during your deliberation of this bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Bobbi L. Johnson, LMSW". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Bobbi L. Johnson, LMSW
Director
Office of Child and Family Services
Maine Department of Health and Human Services