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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 1414 – *An Act to Support and Sustain Maine's Child Care Workforce*

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

Thank you for the opportunity to provide information and perspective on LD 1414, *An Act to Support and Sustain Maine's Child Care Workforce*. This letter responds to the Sponsor's amendment circulated to interested parties.

The first part of the sponsor's amendment to this bill would create an additional workforce salary supplement for child care staff who provide direct care to children aged six weeks to 36 months. The amount of the additional supplement would be \$120 per month (in addition to the current Early Childhood Educator Workforce Salary Supplement payments of \$240, \$360, or \$540 depending on the individual's level in the Maine Roads to Quality Registry).

Access to high quality infant and young toddler care is a shared priority between the Legislature and the Department. This is why OCFS adds infant and toddler stipends on top of the base child care rate for Child Care Affordability Program (CCAP) awards.

With respect to this proposal, at present there are around 7,500 individuals receiving a stipend payment through the salary supplement program each month. OCFS does not collect data regarding the ages of the children these providers care for, but our best estimate of the cost is roughly \$9,000,000 per year. Boosting the workforce of providers who serve the youngest children would meet a community need. As the Committee is aware, the Child Care Affordability Program (CCAP) is currently operating with a waitlist, meaning that some children and families who need care and who qualify for assistance are not getting it at this time. OCFS will require additional staff resources to implement the salary supplements due to the complexity and new tracking requirements. Finally, between child care scholarships and other investments like the existing stipends and federal funds for child care being fully expended. Due to this, LD 1414 will require general funds.

Over the years, we've discussed the impact of stipends on workforces with the Committee – noting the importance of supporting staff but the risk that there is a migration of workers leaving gaps elsewhere in the workforce. While we agree that there is a significant need for affordable and accessible infant and

young toddler care statewide, there may be unintended consequences when one group of educators is favored financially over another that the Committee should consider.

On a technical note, OCFS would also like to bring the Committee's attention to variation in language between Sections 1 and 2 of the salary supplement changes in the bill. Section 1 states "The department shall develop and implement a system to provide salary supplements to child care providers and early childhood educators who provide direct services to children". Section 2 of the bill is less clear as it states that the Department shall amend the Early Childhood Educator Workforce Salary Supplement System rules to provide "additional salary supplements to early childhood educators who are employed at child care centers or family child care providers who are caring for infants and toddlers". The rulemaking authorization language could be interpreted to include all programs that provide infant and young toddler care, not specific to staff who provide that care. This is likely unintentional, and as such we bring it to the Committee's attention as you continue to review and consider refining the language of the proposal.

The second part of the amended bill would establish a grant program for providers to facilitate the availability of child care between the hours of 6pm and 6am. The grants are intended to allow providers to hire experts, consultants, or dedicated staff to develop a plan for how the provider could and would provide child care between the hours of 6pm and 6am. As drafted, the language only requires that providers "develop a plan" for providing care between these hours; it does not require that providers use the funds to actually implement such an initiative. We respectfully request clarity as to whether providers are expected to implement such a program, and if there are financial consequences with respect to the grant funds should they not implement a developed plan or ultimately determine that providing the care is not feasible so that the Department can implement the program in line with legislative intent.

The intent behind this bill is clear and supportive of our shared goals to improve access to child care for Maine families. We appreciate the Committee's consideration of the many pressures in the child care funding landscape, and of our comments related to specificity in the language.

Sincerely,

Bobbi L. Johnson, LMSW

Bobbi L. Johnson, LMSW
Director
Office of Child and Family Services

