

January 21, 2026

To the Esteemed Members of the Health and Human Services Committee:

I am a working mother and childcare director and I am writing in support of LD 1414. It is well known that infant and toddler care is the most expensive care to provide in Maine's child care system. Infant and toddler classrooms require significantly lower staff-to-child ratios, such as one educator for every four infants, compared to much higher ratios for preschool-aged children. Staffing makes up the largest share of a child care program's costs, which means infant and toddler care costs substantially more to deliver than care for older children. These costs are fixed and unavoidable, yet Child Care Affordability payment rates have not kept pace with the true cost of providing care for Maine's youngest children.

Infant and toddler care is also the hardest for families to afford. The average annual cost of infant care in Maine is approximately \$11,000–\$12,000 per year, rivaling or exceeding the cost of in-state college tuition. For many families, child care consumes 20–30% or more of household income, far above what is considered affordable. These costs hit families at a time when earnings are often lowest, especially for new parents.

Maine has a documented shortage of infant and toddler care. Approximately 22% of Maine's population lives in a child care desert, defined as areas with more than three children under age five for every licensed child care slot. Infant and toddler slots are the scarcest statewide, with providers reporting waitlists that often exceed a year. Shortages are especially severe in rural communities but exist across urban and suburban areas as well.

Current Child Care Affordability payment rates do not cover the cost of care. Providers consistently report that they lose money on infant and toddler classrooms because subsidy reimbursement rates fall below the true cost of care. Market-rate-based reimbursement does not reflect staffing realities, facility costs, or quality requirements. As a result, many programs cap infant and toddler enrollment or choose not to offer these age groups at all.

Child care programs face increasing financial pressure due to market shifts. As more preschool-aged children enroll in public pre-K outside the mixed delivery model, private child care programs are losing tuition revenue from older children who historically helped offset the higher cost of infant care. This growing competition makes it even harder for programs to cross-subsidize infant and toddler classrooms, threatening the sustainability of child care businesses.

Raising payment rates helps stabilize and sustain child care programs. Increasing Child Care Affordability payment rates for infants and toddlers allows providers to cover staffing costs, retain qualified educators, and maintain safe and high-quality environments. Higher reimbursement makes it financially feasible for programs to open, sustain, or expand infant and toddler classrooms rather than closing them.

The lack of infant and toddler care has a measurable economic cost for Maine. According to the Council for a Strong America, Maine loses approximately \$400 million every year due specifically to the lack of infant and toddler child care. These losses come from reduced workforce participation, lost earnings, and lower productivity, underscoring that infant and toddler care is not only a family issue but a statewide economic issue.

LD 1414 addresses a structural market failure. Infant and toddler care cannot be sustained by parent fees alone. Without public investment that reflects the true cost of care, the market will continue to undersupply infant and toddler slots. LD 1414 recognizes this reality by increasing subsidy payment rates to incentivize infant and toddler care, stabilize providers, support families, and strengthen Maine's economy.

Please consider support this important legislation to continue to work towards stabilizing the childcare field which will only have significant impact on the economy and support Maine's working families,

Thank you for your time,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Meghann'.

Meghann Carrasco
Executive Director & Founder
Seedlings to Sunflowers Nonprofit Childcare Center
Gorham, ME