



**TESTIMONY BY KIM RUSSELL
STATE DIRECTOR, READYNATION
TO THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEES ON APPROPRIATIONS AND FINANCIAL AFFAIRS
AND HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
WEDNESDAY, FEB. 18, 2026, 1 P.M. HHS/CHILDREN'S SERVICES
NEITHER FOR NOR AGAINST L.D. 2122 An Act Making Unified Supplemental Appropriations and
Allocations for the Expenditures of State Government,
General Fund and Other Funds, and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper
Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2026 and June 30, 2027**

Chairs Rotundo and Gattine, Ingwersen, and Meyer, and distinguished members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Health and Human Services Committees, I am Kim Russell, State Director of ReadyNation. ReadyNation is a business leader organization dedicated to building a skilled workforce and strong economy by promoting evidence-based policy solutions that prepare children to succeed in education, work, and life. Since August 2024 we have been operating under Educate Maine.

I am testifying neither for nor against LD 2122 with the request that you consider adding in funding for an omission – which is \$15 million to clear the current waitlist of more than 1,000 children and families on the Child Care Affordability Program's (CCAP) waitlist.

My organization and many others appreciate your tremendous support for the child care sector in recent budgets. But, as we said then, that was just the beginning of addressing the needs.

Child care is critical to Maine's businesses and our economy, in addition to Maine families and children.

We know that if parents do not have child care, they cannot go to work. If they lose their child care, they cannot go to work. If they miss too many days because of child care gaps, far too many lose or leave their jobs altogether. Simply stated: employers need a reliable workforce and that reliable workforce depends on reliable child care.

Child care is the workforce behind every other Maine workforce.

In 2019 ReadyNation conducted a national study that found the lack of affordable child care in America was costing the economy \$57 billion annually. Four years later and post-COVID, in 2023, we repeated that study and found that the numbers have more than doubled to \$122 billion in lost earnings, productivity, and revenue every year.

In Maine, the lack of child care for children just up to age 3, **costs our state economy \$403 million a year** – also more than double the 2019 estimate of \$180 million a year. (*see attached report or view it [here](#)*)

The 2023 national analysis featured a survey in which many parents reported that the infant-toddler child care crisis had caused them to be fired or to have pay or hours reduced nearly **three times more often** than in 2019. The crisis caused parents to be demoted or transferred to a less desirable job, or change from full-time to part-time work, more than twice as often. Rates of parents reporting quitting a job due to childcare problems doubled.

Part of the structural problem, we know, is staff shortages experienced by child care providers, driven by low compensation. According to Maine Department of Labor, the average pay to a child care educator **with** the current stipend is \$16.40 an hour. This wage translates to an annual mean wage for child care educators of a little more than \$34,000.

We appreciate your support to preserving current child care funding through the state budget process, but wish to point out that there are currently more than 1,000 Maine families/children on the CCAP waitlist that this supplemental budget does not address.

We ask you to add this needed funding into the supplemental budget draft before you. It is an important measure to help us strengthen Maine's still fragile child care sector and support lower-income working parents.