

## Written Testimony Regarding LD 2212 and in support of LD 1089, LD 229, and LD 1879

*Delivered to the Maine State Joint Standing Committees on Appropriations and Financial Affairs, and Health and Human Services*

*18 February 2026 | By Joshua Failé*

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, Senator Ingwerson, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services:

My name is Joshua Failé. I am a father of a 4 year-old, and live and work in Bangor, Maine. I am here today to testify neither for nor against LD 2212. I am here, however, to urge you to strengthen the final budget by increasing ongoing funding for the Child Care Affordability Program (CCAP) by \$15 million, making the CCAP Educator Award permanent, and ensuring we raise the revenue necessary to sustain these essential investments.

Let me begin with the main reason I am asking you to act: safe, high-quality child care is not optional and is not merely a “social issue”. It is *essential* infrastructure. It is as fundamental to a functioning economy as roads, broadband, or electricity. Without it, working families like mine cannot fully participate in Maine’s labor force, employers cannot fill open positions, and communities cannot grow.

As an economist and data analyst, with a particular focus on demographic and economic modeling, I can say with confidence that Maine cannot afford continued underinvestment in early childhood care. We are the oldest state in the nation, and our working-age population is not growing fast enough to sustain the level of economic activity required to fund current municipal, county, and state services—much less expand them. Lack of access to affordable childcare leads not only to more younger people moving away from Maine to start their families, but it discourages migration of young people to Maine from other parts of the United States and abroad, further exacerbating an already dire demographic trend. And when parents living in Maine are forced onto childcare waitlists, to scale back their hours, or to leave the workforce altogether, the consequences are not confined to just those individual households. They ripple outward through businesses, local economies, tax revenues, and the future economic wellbeing of our great state.

We already know the cost of inaction: a 2023 report estimated that Maine’s underinvestment in childcare is costing the state roughly \$400 million annually in lost economic activity, wages, and tax revenue. That is not a marginal inefficiency, that is a structural drag on our economy. A more recent comprehensive national analysis cited in a 2024 Federal Reserve study finds that insufficient childcare options for families with children under age five now costs the U.S. economy about \$172 billion annually, comprised of \$134 billion in lost earnings for families, \$38 billion in reduced employer productivity, and \$37 billion in lower federal and state tax revenues.

An additional \$15 million in ongoing funding for CCAP would immediately support more than 1,000 children currently on the waitlist and help prevent future waitlists that destabilize families and employers alike. CCAP is not simply a social service; it is a proven economic stabilizer and growth catalyst. It allows parents to work, pursue education, or complete job training. It provides predictable payments to childcare providers operating on razor-thin margins. It keeps small businesses open. It strengthens workforce participation. And it ensures that children are in safe, enriching environments during the most critical years of brain development.

This is not merely social policy, it is sound economic policy. Decades of research shows that every dollar invested in early childhood education can generate seven dollars or more in long-term benefits through higher lifetime earnings, improved health outcomes, and reduced public expenditures. A recent analysis by the Prenatal-to-3 Policy Impact Center found that after Virginia invested an additional \$309 million in childcare subsidies and mixed-delivery programs, expanded access served more than 11,100 children under age 5 and led to nearly 11,000 new mothers returning to work, lifted over 5,500 children out of poverty, and generated at least \$324 million in annual taxable income for families. The analysis also found that families were able to redirect past childcare spending toward other necessities, increasing disposable income by almost \$40 million per year, money which then at least partially flowed back into their local economies. Few investments available to state government carry that kind of return.

But funding access alone is not sufficient. We must also stabilize and professionalize the workforce that makes access possible. Making the CCAP Educator Award permanent would provide tuition support and meaningful financial stability to early childhood educators—workers who are asked to perform some of the most important labor in our society for wages that are often unsustainably low. I can say from firsthand experience that the pilot program demonstrated clear benefits in retention, morale, and recruitment. My son's teachers at Parkside Children's Learning Center here in Bangor have told me in no uncertain terms that they would likely not be able to stay in their positions without support from CCAP. Yet its promise has been constrained by limited funding and waitlists. Permanency and expansion would strengthen the very foundation of the childcare system.

We cannot talk about expanding childcare access without talking about revenue and the short- and long-term economic wellbeing of Maine. Funding for childcare is essential to Maine families and to Maine's economy. If we are serious about sustaining it, we must be equally serious about raising the necessary revenue and ensuring a prosperous future for our children. I urge you to reject copying federal corporate tax cuts that primarily benefit the ultra-wealthy and instead include LD 1089, LD 229, and LD 1879—or stronger measures—in the final budget. If we believe childcare is essential infrastructure, then we must fund it like essential infrastructure.

This is not about partisanship. It is about economic stability. It is about workforce sustainability. It is about ensuring that young families can build their lives in Maine rather than feeling forced to leave (or not come here at all). And it is about recognizing that well-supported and resourced early childhood is not a private luxury—it is a public good with profound long-term consequences.

We cannot claim to care about workforce shortages while leaving thousands of children on waitlists.

We cannot ask parents to participate fully in the economy without ensuring safe places for their children.

We cannot speak about long-term fiscal responsibility while ignoring one of the highest return-on-investments available to us.

Maine's future prosperity depends on the decisions you make in this budget.

I urge you to increase ongoing funding for CCAP by \$15 million, make the Educator Award permanent, and adopt revenue measures sufficient to sustain these investments.

Thank you for your time and your service.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Joshua Failé".

Joshua Failé

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