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As the owner and director of an early childhood education program in Maine, I see every single day how critical the Child Care Affordability Program is for families, educators, and the stability of our communities.

At Portside Learning Center, we serve over 70 children and employ 16 staff members. We are a program deeply rooted in quality—Montessori-inspired, nature-based, and intentionally designed to support children’s independence, resilience, and love of learning. But none of that is sustainable without accessible funding that allows families to afford care and programs to maintain the staffing required to stay open.

Without ongoing investment in the Child Care Affordability Program, families are forced into impossible decisions—reducing work hours, leaving the workforce entirely, or piecing together unreliable arrangements. We hear it directly from our families: without this support, they simply could not work.

At the same time, programs like mine are navigating rising costs across every area—staff wages, benefits, food, utilities, and materials—while trying to keep tuition within reach. Early childhood educators are professionals doing incredibly complex and important work, yet wages remain unsustainably low without public investment. Programs cannot raise tuition enough to cover true costs without pricing families out entirely.

This is not a luxury system—it is essential infrastructure. Our economy depends on it. Parents cannot work if they do not have reliable early childhood education, and businesses across Maine feel that impact.

We have made the decision to remain open even during advocacy efforts because we know how deeply families depend on us—but staying open does not mean the system is working. It means we are holding it together.

An ongoing \$15 million investment in the Child Care Affordability Program would provide stability for families, allow programs to plan responsibly, and support the workforce that makes this system possible. Without it, we risk program closures, reduced access, and a further loss of educators in a field that is already under strain.

Investing in early childhood education is investing in Maine’s workforce today and in the future of our children. We cannot afford to step back now.

I’m asking you to include \$15 million of ongoing investment into the Child Care Affordability Program.

I have had the privilege of witnessing firsthand the life-changing impact that the Child Care Affordability Program has on children, families, and educators.

As the owner and director of Portside Learning Center, a nature-based, Montessori-inspired early childhood education program in Maine, I see every day how critical this funding is. We serve over 70 children and employ 16 staff members, and behind every enrollment is a family trying to balance work, finances, and the well-being of their child.

I have sat across from parents who are doing everything right—working full time, contributing to their communities—and still cannot make the numbers work without support. I have had families in tears, not because they don’t value early childhood education, but because without assistance, it simply becomes out of reach. These funds are often the difference between a parent staying in the workforce or having to leave their job.

For children, the impact is just as profound. Access to consistent, high-quality early childhood education means stability, safety, and the opportunity to build foundational skills during the most critical years of development. At Portside, that looks like children learning independence, building relationships, and spending their days outdoors—growing into capable, confident learners. This is not just supervision—this

is education that shapes who they become.

At the same time, programs like mine are facing increasing financial pressure. The cost of providing high-quality early childhood education continues to rise—fair wages for educators, benefits, food, materials, and maintaining safe environments. We are committed to paying our educators as professionals, but we cannot shift the full cost onto families without making tuition unattainable.

We are constantly balancing on a very thin margin—trying to keep early childhood education accessible for families while also sustaining a workforce that is already underpaid for the importance of their work. Without ongoing public investment, that balance becomes impossible.

This is not just a family issue—it is an economic issue. I often say, “families cannot work if their early childhood education program does not work.” Businesses across Maine depend on a stable, reliable system, and right now, that system is fragile.

An ongoing \$15 million investment in the Child Care Affordability Program would provide critical stability. It allows families to stay in the workforce, ensures children have access to safe and enriching environments, and supports the educators who make this system possible.

I am asking you to support this investment because I see every day what is at stake—and I have seen the incredible difference it makes when families are given the support they need.

Investing in early childhood education is investing in Maine’s future.