

Testimony of Linda Caprara
on behalf of the Maine State Chamber of Commerce
in support of L.D. 2199, An Act to Ensure Subsidy Reimbursement and Emergency Financial Assistance for
Certain Child Care Providers”
before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

Good Afternoon, Sen. Baldacci, Rep. Meyer and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is Linda Caprara. I am the Vice President of Advocacy for the Maine State Chamber of Commerce and a resident of Winthrop. We are here to testify in support of L.D. 2199, An Act to Ensure Subsidy Reimbursement and Emergency Financial Assistance for Certain ChildCare Providers. We would like to thank Sen. Jackson for submitting this bill.

Last year, this committee passed a comprehensive childcare bill L.D. 1726 that increased wage stipends for childcare workers, increased subsidy eligibility for parents, increased funding for Headstart and created a scholarship program for children of childcare workers who needed childcare. However, it did not address one important piece: subsidy based on enrollment rather than attendance.

LD 2199 proposes to build upon the meaningful investments you and your colleagues made last year to support our childcare and early education system, in two specific ways. First, it changes the methodology of the childcare subsidy reimbursements so that the reimbursements are based on child enrollment, not attendance – just as our public schools do.

Paying childcare workers based on attendance will only exacerbate the exodus of workers leaving the industry to take jobs that pay better in other areas of education.

Since the pandemic there has been a 19% decline in childcare workers. Childcare educators earn on average \$20K less than their kindergarten teacher counterparts. There is a significant wage disparity that is not reflective of differences in training or education. This wage disparity is cited as the number one reason for the industry’s retention issue and has been seen through the common practice of early childhood educators migrating to Pre-K-second grade for higher wages. The decline in the number of childcare workers has put significant stress on an already strained industry. We are already in need of 1100 new childcare workers in order to fill current program capacity. We simply cannot afford to lose anymore childcare workers and need to hang on to the ones we have in the system.

Second, LD 2199 creates a program to provide short-term, one-time emergency financial assistance to cover emergency facility or operational costs. Any financial assistance given would be backed up with technical assistance to support providers’ financial planning and stability.

The Federal Government is currently promulgating rules on the issue of basing subsidy reimbursement on enrollment versus attendance. The feds are accepting public comment on those rules as we speak. Early childcare educators are the workforce behind our workforce. In order to expand Maine’s workforce participation rate, increase employee retention, and reduce workplace disruption, we must act to expand the