

**Testimony in Support of LD 1955 – An Act to Increase Child Care Affordability and Early Childhood Educator Stability**

**Presented by Raphael Kabata, Owner of Riverside Academy LLC  
Before the Health & Human Services Committee**

Dear Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and Members of the Health & Human Services Committee:

My name is Raphael Kabata. I live in Lisbon, Maine, and I'm here today to testify on behalf of Riverside Academy LLC, the child care center my wife and I own and operate in downtown Lewiston. Riverside Academy is licensed to care for up to 119 children.

I am testifying in support of **LD 1955**, because the Child Care Affordability Program (CCAP) is essential to the survival of businesses like ours—and to the working families we serve.

When we were building Riverside Academy, one of our first major challenges was finding and purchasing a building that could meet the requirements for licensed child care. As you may know, meeting those requirements can be costly. We had to take out loans for both the building and our startup expenses.

Riverside Academy was officially licensed in November 2024, the very same week that the CCAP funding hit its limit and a statewide waiting list was imposed. Our center is located on Lisbon Street in the heart of Lewiston. Even before opening, we had a waitlist of 28 children. But when CCAP funding became unavailable, many of those families disappeared—because they simply couldn't afford child care without assistance.

Lewiston's poverty rate is 70% higher than the state average. Unemployment here is 24% higher than the statewide average. We opened our center to help change that—to give working parents a safe, convenient, high-quality place to bring their children so they could keep or start jobs. Most of the families we serve are exactly the kind of families CCAP is designed to support.

When CCAP became unavailable, we watched parents—many starting new or entry-level jobs—struggle to pay tuition. Some were forced to withdraw their children. Others had no extended family or safe options for child care. Without CCAP, they had no choice but to stay home, losing income or job opportunities.

This financial strain didn't just affect our families—it nearly forced us to close our doors. To avoid shutting down, we took on even more debt just to keep operating. But this is not sustainable.

If CCAP is not funded, more child care providers like Riverside will close. Why? Because there are not enough families who can afford the true cost of quality child care without help.

Right now:

- **630 children** are on the CCAP waiting list statewide.
- **90% of those families** could get immediate help if LD 1955 is passed and funded.

Supporting CCAP means:

- More parents can keep their jobs or start new ones.
- Employers in Lewiston from factories to distribution centers to retail stores can hire and retain workers.
- Parents can go to work focused and confident, knowing their children are safe and cared for by trained professionals.
- Early childhood educators, like our team at Riverside, can stay employed and support their own families.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my story. I urge you to support LD 1955 and fund the Child Care Affordability Program. In Lewiston, we have the families, the jobs, and the will to work. we just need your help making child care affordable.

Sincerely,

**Raphael Kabata**

Owner, Riverside Academy LLC

Lewiston, Maine