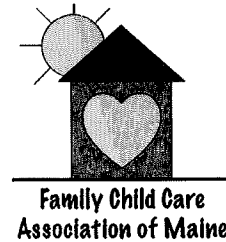




Maine Association for the Education
of Young Children



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

Submitted by Heather Marden on behalf of the Maine Association for the Education of Young
Children and the Family Child Care Association of Maine
To the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and Honorable Members of the Committee:

My name is Heather Marden, and I am pleased to submit this testimony on behalf of the *Maine Association for the Education of Young Children* and the *Family Child Care Association of Maine* in strong support of LD 1955: *An Act to Increase Child Care Affordability and Early Educator Stability*.

LD 1955 is a comprehensive, forward-thinking bill that addresses the twin crises of affordability for families and economic instability for early childhood educators. The bill recognizes a basic truth: child care is essential infrastructure for Maine's economy, and the professionals who provide it must be supported as the foundational workforce they are.

Maine Child Care Affordability Program Child Care Employment Award

This provision acknowledges the reality that many child care providers struggle to afford care for their own children. By establishing a mechanism for direct support for providers and educators in need of child care themselves, Maine is making a profound statement: that working in child care should not require sacrificing one's own child's access to quality early education.

This program is already extremely popular—so much so that it expended all available funding within just three months and now has a lengthy waitlist. The strong demand clearly demonstrates that this initiative meets a critical and urgent need in the field.

The program was modeled after a successful recruitment and retention strategy in Kentucky, which has shown promising results in stabilizing the early childhood workforce. By covering 100% of child care tuition costs for the children of eligible early educators, this award not only supports working families but also helps retain professionals in the field. Furthermore, the program strategically blends and braids funding with the Child Care Affordability Program (CCAP) for those who are eligible, allowing public dollars to stretch further while maximizing impact.

Without access to this program, educators are left to navigate the burdensome CCAP waitlist, which can act as a significant barrier to their ability to remain in or enter the child care workforce. In a sector already facing acute staffing shortages, any unnecessary hurdle to employment is a step backward for Maine's families and economy.

By continuing and expanding this award, Maine will not only improve affordability for early educators but also strengthen the stability and sustainability of the child care system as a whole.

Salary Sustainability Program for Child Care Professionals

Maine, like much of the country, is experiencing an unprecedented workforce crisis in early childhood education. Qualified professionals are leaving the field due to low wages and lack of advancement opportunities. By creating a tiered salary supplement system, this legislation lays the groundwork for a stable, professionalized workforce. It incentivizes longevity, values education and experience, and puts real dollars behind the message that early educators matter.

These are not just bonuses—they are a critical tool to build the base wages of early childhood educators and ensure that they are foundationally recognized for the vital work they do. Since the inception of this program, we have seen approximately an 11% growth in the early childhood workforce, clearly demonstrating that when we invest in educators, they come and they stay. This growth is not only promising—it's essential for meeting the increasing demand for child care across Maine. We can't build new programs without them.

As the field continues to grow and more educators advance their credentials, it is critical that the investment in this program grows alongside them. Without adequate annual adjustments, the per-person supplement amount may decrease when the state recalculates based on the growing number of eligible educators and their tier placements. This could result in reduced supplements year over year, as happened last July, undermining the program's effectiveness and discouraging continued professional development. Ensuring the program keeps pace with the workforce it aims to support is vital for long-term sustainability and success. We thank you for the favorable vote on the Biennial Budget to reject cuts to child care and we hope this legislation lets educators know that even the smallest cuts to these stipends in a year is recognized as detrimental to the sustainability of keeping them in the field.

Scholarships and Apprenticeships

The pathway to a more qualified workforce begins with access to education. This section builds meaningful workforce development by supporting aspiring and current educators through scholarships and apprenticeships—approaches proven to increase both entry and retention in the field. These programs remove financial barriers and create career ladders within early childhood education, which is vital for sustaining a strong, skilled, and diverse workforce.

While there are existing models of scholarships and apprenticeships currently operating in Maine, their availability has fluctuated over time, disrupting the continuity of support that early educators depend on. These programs have come and gone in the past, leaving educators without the necessary resources to complete their degrees or professional development goals. Embedding this program in statute ensures a continued and reliable commitment to career pathways for early

childhood professionals—one that won't be vulnerable to shifting administrative priorities or temporary funding.

This statutory language will provide the foundation needed to institutionalize and stabilize these career supports, enabling early educators to plan their futures with confidence and encouraging new professionals to enter the field knowing there are meaningful opportunities for growth.

Early Childhood Education in Career and Technical Education (CTE) Centers

Ensuring early childhood education opportunities in CTE programs grow across Maine creates early pipelines into the profession. High school students gain exposure to the field and begin developing skills in their own communities, which is especially critical for rural and underserved areas. Collaboration between the State Board of Education and the Department of Health and Human Services ensures alignment and effectiveness.

Sustainability of the Maine Child Care Affordability Program

The Maine Child Care Affordability Program is a foundational support for working families across the state, yet today over 600 families remain on the waitlist—unable to access affordable care that would allow them to work, pursue education, or maintain stability at home. Investments in this program are necessary to move families off the waitlist and ensure that child care is not a barrier to economic participation.

While a one-time allocation of funding has helped launch or temporarily stabilize the program, the required reporting from the Office of Child and Family Services will be essential in identifying long-term strategies for a more stable and consistent funding model. Maine must use this opportunity to build a system that is not reliant on temporary solutions but committed to enduring access and equity.

Families earning 0–125% of the State Median Income all struggle under the current cost of child care. When child care payments exceed a mortgage or rival in-state college tuition, Maine's lower-middle-income families are often the most burdened—earning just enough to be excluded from other public supports, yet not enough to afford care without making difficult sacrifices. For these families, child care is not just a budget item—it's a make-or-break factor in whether a parent, often a mother, can work.

We know that women are disproportionately impacted by the lack of affordable child care. Many in this income bracket who would choose to work and build their careers are forced to make a different choice for themselves and their families. Child care costs are often the deciding factor that leads women to pause or leave their careers, reducing their long-term economic mobility.

A truly sustainable child care system must serve all families who qualify, ensure consistent funding, and remove child care as a barrier to economic participation and gender equity. Maine now has the chance to lead with a forward-thinking, inclusive approach to family well-being and workforce development.

(Next Page: Current and Target Salaries for Maine Child Care Professionals. Data from Maine's Child Care Cost Study)

Table 22: Center-Based Current Wage Assumptions—Site Leadership and Direct Care

Position	County Group 1		County Group 2		County Group 3		Cumberland		Notes
	Hourly	Annual	Hourly	Annual	Hourly	Annual	Hourly	Annual	Data used from C3 application to estimate this wage
Model 1—Star 2 Program									2024 Market Rate Survey Data
Director	\$23.25	\$48,360	\$ 23.63	\$49,150	\$24.00	\$49,920	\$51,480	\$24.75	Median of Center Director
Assistant Director	\$ 19.95	\$41,496	\$ 19.00	\$39,520	\$20.19	\$41,995	\$43,680	\$21.00	Median Assistant Director
Lead Teacher	\$16.50	\$34,320	\$ 17.00	\$35,360	\$17.50	\$36,400	\$36,920	\$17.75	Median of Lead Teacher
Assistant Teacher	\$15.50	\$32,240	\$ 15.75	\$32,760	\$16.00	\$33,280	\$34,320	\$16.50	Median of Assistant Teacher
Floater	\$15.50	\$32,240	\$ 15.75	\$32,760	\$16.00	\$33,280	\$34,320	\$16.50	Median of Lead Teacher
Model 2—Star 4 Program									Increase from Star 2 Wages
Director	\$26.51	\$55,130	\$26.94	\$56,031	\$27.36	\$56,909	\$28.22	\$58,687	Increase of 14%
Assistant Director	\$ 22.74	\$47,305	\$21.66	\$45,053	\$ 23.02	\$47,875	\$23.94	\$49,795	Increase of 14%
Lead Teacher	\$18.32	\$38,095	\$ 18.87	\$39,250	\$19.43	\$40,404	\$19.70	\$40,981	Increase of 11%
Assistant Teacher	\$16.59	\$34,497	\$16.85	\$35,053	\$17.12	\$35,610	\$ 17.66	\$36,722	Increase of 7%
Floater	\$15.89	\$33,046	\$16.14	\$33,579	\$16.40	\$34,112	\$16.91	\$16.91	Increase of 11%

Table 24: Center-Based Target Salaries

Position		County Group 1		County Group 2		County Group 3		County Group 4		Notes
		Hourly	Annual	Hourly	Annual	Hourly	Annual	Hourly	Annual	
Site Leadership										
Director	Tier III	\$38.50	\$80,080	\$39.20	\$81,536	\$40.25	\$83,720	\$40.95	\$85,176	40% more than lead teacher wages
	Tier II	\$31.50	\$65,520	\$31.85	\$66,248	\$32.55	\$67,704	\$33.60	\$69,888	
	Tier I	\$28.00	\$58,240	\$28.35	\$58,968	\$29.05	\$60,424	\$29.75	\$61,880	
Assistant Director	Tier III	\$32.45	\$67,496	\$32.45	\$67,496	\$33.93	\$70,574	\$34.52	\$71,802	18% more than lead teacher wages
	Tier II	\$26.55	\$55,224	\$26.55	\$55,224	\$27.44	\$57,075	\$28.32	\$58,906	
	Tier I	\$23.60	\$49,088	\$23.60	\$49,088	\$24.49	\$50,939	\$25.08	\$52,166	
Classroom Teachers										
Lead Teacher	Tier III	\$27.50	\$57,200	\$27.50	\$57,200	\$28.00	\$58,240	\$29.25	\$60,840	Anchored to K-12 Parity BA +5
	Tier II	\$22.50	\$46,800	\$22.50	\$46,800	\$22.75	\$47,320	\$24.00	\$49,920	22% Less than Tier III
	Tier I	\$20.00	\$41,600	\$20.00	\$41,600	\$20.25	\$42,120	\$21.25	\$44,200	10% more than living wage
Assistant Teacher	Tier III	\$24.75	\$51,480	\$24.75	\$51,480	\$25.25	\$52,520	\$26.25	\$54,600	10% Less than K-12 Parity (BA +5)
	Tier II	\$20.25	\$42,120	\$20.25	\$42,120	\$20.50	\$42,640	\$21.50	\$44,720	22% less than Tier III
	Tier I	\$17.25	\$35,880	\$17.25	\$35,880	\$17.50	\$36,400	\$18.50	\$38,480	Anchored to Living Wage
Floater	Tier III	\$24.75	\$51,480	\$24.75	\$51,480	\$25.25	\$52,520	\$26.25	\$54,600	Same as Assistant Teacher
	Tier II	\$20.25	\$42,120	\$20.25	\$42,120	\$20.50	\$42,640	\$21.50	\$44,720	
	Tier I	\$17.25	\$35,880	\$17.25	\$35,880	\$17.50	\$36,400	\$18.50	\$38,480	