



Department of the Secretary of State Maine Permanent Commission on the Status of Women



JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

L.D. 1414 "An Act to Support and Sustain Maine's Child Care Workforce"

Testimony of Elinor Higgins

Executive Director, Maine Permanent Commission on the Status of Women

January 21, 2026

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, Members of the Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Elinor Higgins. I am a resident of Portland, and I am the Executive Director of Maine's Permanent Commission on the Status of Women, which is part of the Department of Secretary of State. The Commission is a government appointed group, created in state statute to improve opportunities and life outcomes for women and girls. The Commission produces biennial reports on the status of women and girls and advises the Governor and members of the Legislature about policy and social issues affecting women across Maine. Today, I am speaking on behalf of the Commission and its Policy and Legislation Committee in support of L.D. 1414 "An Act to Support and Sustain Maine's Child Care Workforce."

Child care has long been a priority for the Commission, both because of its role in supporting better economic outcomes for Maine women and Maine families, but also because of the predominantly female workforce that provides education and care for Maine children.¹ In December 2024, the Commission released a report on Maine women's labor and economic security.² In that report, we celebrated several significant state investments aimed at bolstering the child care workforce and child care providers while also improving affordability for families. However, the Commission's findings also highlighted ongoing challenges:

- According to the U.S. Current Population Survey, Maine women are more likely than Maine men to cite child care issues as a barrier to full time work.
- In 2024, the average annual cost of center-based child care for an infant in Maine reached \$15,730.³
- The high cost of child care is one key driver of Maine women dropping out of the workforce or opting for part-time work – a reality that has lasting economic impacts across the lifespan.
- All counties in Maine face a gap between available child care services and the number of children that need care.

¹ Maine Permanent Commission on the Status of Women. (2023). "White Paper: Maine Needs Quality, Affordable Child Care." Available at: <https://www.maine.gov/sos/sites/maine.gov.sos/files/content/assets/PCSW-20Childcare-20White-20Page-202023-20Final-20011724-1.pdf>

² Maine Permanent Commission on the Status of Women. (2024). "A Report on Maine Women's Labor and Economic Security." Available at: <https://www.maine.gov/sos/womens-comm/documents/MaineStatusOfWomenReport2024.pdf>.

Note: Data cited throughout this testimony is drawn from the report – please see link above for further citations and information.

³ Child Care Aware of America. (2024). "Child Care in America: 2024 Price & Supply Report." Available at: <https://info.childcareaware.org/hubfs/Pricing%20and%20Landscape%20Infograms/Pricing%20Sheets%20PDF/2024-2025-price-fact-sheet-child-care-affordability-Maine.pdf>

- A 2023 study found that the lack of reliable child care for working parents of children under age 3 could cost the state as much as \$403 million annually.⁴

L.D. 1414 would aim to address core affordability challenges for infant and toddler care, something that is good for families and good for child care businesses.

L.D. 1414 also includes funding for a planning grant program aimed at bolstering child care during non-traditional hours. In May 2024, Gov. Mills signed an executive order aimed at increasing women's employment in construction and trades careers. The Commission partnered with Maine Department of Labor to hold focus groups and interviews with women across the state who are employed in construction, engineering, and the trades. One major concern elevated during these conversations was the lack of available child care during the hours of a typical construction work day. One parent shared the experience of being on a temporary job site:

"You might be somewhere for a month or two, an hour and a half away from home, and you have to be there at 6:30 am. Meanwhile, your daycare doesn't open until 9:00 am."

Construction employers also brought this up as a challenge facing all working parents who are unable to participate in evening or weekend work shifts.⁵ These findings highlight the need for additional off-hour child care resources, and there is also a clear need beyond the construction industry, including in health care professions.

The Maine Permanent Commission on the Status of Women is in support of L.D. 1414. We appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony today. Thank you again for your time and attention.

⁴ Ready Nation. (2023). "The Growing, Annual Cost of the Infant-Toddler Child Care Crisis in Maine." Available at: <https://strongnation.s3.amazonaws.com/documents/1646/3097bc0d-bb8f-4433-8ad7-1c0f97f1f317.pdf?1681153184&inline;%20filename=%22The%20Growing,%20Annual%20Cost%20of%20the%20Infant-Toddler%20Child%20Care%20Crisis%20in%20Maine.pdf%22>

⁵ Maine Department of Labor. Women in Construction Executive Order Progress Report: October 2024. Available at: <https://www.mainelabor.gov/docs/2024/womeninconstruction/WomeninConstructionOctober2024.pdf>