



TESTIMONY BY KIM RUSSELL
STATE DIRECTOR, READY NATION

TO THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 21, 2026, 1 P.M.

IN SUPPORT OF
L.D. 1414 AN ACT TO SUPPORT AND SUSTAIN MAINE'S CHILD CARE WORKFORCE

Chairs Ingwersen, and Meyer, and distinguished members of the Health and Human Services Committee, I am Kim Russell, State Director of ReadyNation. ReadyNation is a business leader organization dedicated to building a skilled workforce and strong economy by promoting evidence-based policy solutions that prepare children to succeed in education, work, and life. Since August 2024 we have been operating under Educate Maine.

I am testifying in support of LD 1414, a bill to help stabilize our still fragile child care sector. I thank the Senate President for bringing this proposal forward. And I thank Senate President Daughtry for championing the need to continue to support Maine's fragile child care sector, as she saw firsthand through her summer and fall tours of many of Maine's child care programs. We appreciate the Senate President's sponsor amendment which now focuses this proposal on addressing the high costs of infant and toddler care through the current subsidy system.

Child care is critical to Maine's businesses and our economy, in addition to Maine families and children. We know that if parents do not have child care, they cannot go to work. If they lose their child care, they cannot go to work. If they miss too many days because of child care gaps, far too many lose or leave their jobs altogether. Simply stated: employers need a reliable workforce and that reliable workforce depends on reliable child care.

Child care is the workforce behind every other Maine workforce.

Currently, child care is hardest to find for parents of infants and toddlers. These are our youngest children who need the most hands-on care and attention. Thus, the adult to child ratio is smaller, and the cost to employ child care providers for our youngest children is steeper.

Due to lack of easily accessible and published data, we don't really know just how many infants and toddlers are currently in child care programs and how many are on waitlists for care. The Office of Child and Family Service's child care data dashboard shows us how many infants and toddlers are in our state subsidy program – the Child Care Affordability Program (CCAP). It shows that, as of September 2025, 72, or less than 2 percent, of the 4151 CCAP-participating children are infants. In fact – 13 of our 16 counties offer less than 10 CCAP-supported infant slots. Nine hundred fifty-four, or 23 percent, of children served by CCAP are toddlers.

And we know that CCAP only served about 10 percent of its eligible population.

We also know, according to the Maine Kids Count Data Book, that 69% of all Maine children ages 6 and younger have all parents in the workplace. Given that, we have approximately 49,000 children birth-age 6 who need care while their parents work to support them.

This bill does not solve all of these challenges, but it's a strong start to make more infant and toddler care available to some of Maine's neediest families by increasing the subsidy quality bump from 10% to 20%, thus



incentivizing more programs to create and sustain more infant and toddler slots for our babies and youngest children who need care. This is a critical start to the work needed to address Maine's dire child care shortage.

I urge your unanimous support of LD 1414.