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Testimony of YMCA Alliance of Northern New England before
the Committee on Health and Human Services
in support of

LD 1414: An Act To Support And Sustain Maine's Child Care Workforce

January 21, 2026

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Health and Human Services Committee, my name is Clara McConnell, I am a Government Affairs Consultant at Maine Street Solutions and I'm here today representing the YMCA Alliance of Northern New England, which includes the 15 YMCAs in Maine. Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of LD 1414.

We understand that the amended version of this bill proposes increasing the Child Care Affordability Program subsidy payment for infant and toddler care from 10% of market rate to 20%. The YMCA Alliance is supportive of that proposal as a timely and important opportunity to address persistent gaps in childcare access across our state. As Maine's largest childcare provider, we see firsthand how families—especially those with infants and toddlers, children with disabilities, and those living in rural or underserved areas—struggle to find stable, affordable care.

Infant and toddler classrooms require significantly lower staff-to-child ratios, such as one educator for every four infants, compared to much higher ratios for preschool-aged children. Staffing makes up the largest share of a child care program's costs, which means infant and toddler care costs substantially more to deliver than care for older children. These costs are rising each year, yet Child Care Affordability Program payment rates have not kept pace with the true cost of providing care for Maine's youngest children.

As more preschool-aged children enroll in public pre-K in our k-12 schools, private child care programs are losing tuition revenue from older children who historically helped offset the higher cost of infant care. While our organization fully supports Maine's efforts to expand public pre-K, the reality on the ground is that this growing competition makes it even harder for programs to cross-subsidize infant and toddler classrooms, threatening the sustainability of child care businesses. As we continue to grow the number of public pre-K programs across the State, we must also invest in the sustainability of infant and toddler care.

Increasing Child Care Affordability Program payment rates for infants and toddlers would allow providers to cover staffing costs, retain and attract qualified educators, and maintain safe and high-quality environments for children. Higher reimbursement makes it financially feasible for programs to open, sustain, or expand infant and toddler classrooms instead of closing them.

While we are supportive of this concept of increasing subsidies for infant and toddler care, we also urge the Legislature to invest more funding into the Child Care Affordability Program overall. Currently, nearly 1,000 Maine families are languishing on the CCAP waitlist, unable to access vital child care tuition support. That is to say, LD 1414 is an important piece of the puzzle, but is not a complete solution to bolstering Maine's child care system.

Maine must continue to pursue innovative and sustainable strategies to expand access to childcare and LD 1414 is a critical step in that direction. We urge the Committee to vote "Ought to Pass."

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Clara McConnell

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