

Testimony of Rita Furlow
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health & Human Services
LD 1414
An Act to Sustain Maine's Child Care Workforce
January 21, 2026

Good morning, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, I am Rita Furlow. I am the Senior Policy Analyst at the Maine Children's Alliance. I am here today to present testimony in support of LD 1414, *An Act to Sustain Maine's Child Care Workforce*. The Maine Children's Alliance is a statewide non-partisan, non-profit research and advocacy organization whose mission is to promote sound public policies to improve the lives of children, youth, and families in Maine.

The brain's architecture is built over time, starting from the bottom up. Therefore, establishing a strong foundation early in life is crucial for everything that follows. This foundation is built by ensuring that young children have positive learning experiences and stable, consistent relationships with caring adults at home and in the community.

Today, with 69% of Maine children under the age of six having both parents working, it is imperative to align Maine's investments in early childhood with the scientific understanding of what children require.¹ This includes supporting educators and accommodating Maine families as they raise the generation that will lead the state into the future.

The earliest years of life are a period of remarkable growth. Infants require numerous essential inputs to shape their brains and establish a healthy foundation for life. These inputs include consistent relationships with caring adults and adequate health and developmental supports. Research consistently demonstrates that high-quality child care, with warm, responsive, and skilled caregivers, healthy and safe environments, and strong community connections, promotes healthy development in infants and toddlers. These factors create a solid foundation for the future.

The Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) is the primary source of federal funding for child care subsidies for working families. Annual CCDBG appropriations include an earmark for investments in infant-toddler care. Maine currently utilizes a system of direct subsidy payments to child care providers on behalf of eligible parents. OCFS

¹ The Annie E. Casey Foundation, KIDS COUNT Data Center, Children under age 6 with all available parents in work force (5-yr averages) in Maine, retrieved from: <https://datacenter.aecf.org/data/tables/7317-children-under-age-6-with-all-available-parents-in-work-force-detailed?loc=21&loc=2#detailed/2/any/false/2545,1095,2048,574,1729,37,871,870,573,869/any/14380,14381>

currently provides a tiered-payment system through the state's quality rating and improvement system, Rising Stars for ME, to provide an incentive child care educators to accept more infants and toddlers.

High-quality infant and toddler care is simply more expensive for programs to offer, due to additional quality requirements such as fewer children per child care provider, more space per child, special equipment (e.g., cribs), and additional health and safety requirements (e.g., sanitary areas for diaper changing).

We have been hearing from parents for many years about the lack of child care for infants. An examination of data from the OCFS dashboard shows that of the 3,298 children currently participating in the Child Care Affordability Program, only 50 of those children are infants. We are supportive of this legislation because it would provide an additional financial incentive to encourage more educators to accept infant and toddler in their programs.

Finally, as you consider this legislation today that could improve access to infant and toddler care, the members of the Education Committee tomorrow will be considering legislation from the Department of Education, LD 2114, to expand public preschool to three-year old children as a result of changes to the Child Development Services. As public preschool in Maine has increased, it has resulted in a loss of four-year old children participating in child care programs, with significant impacts on the business model of child care. We ask you to please consider a way to work together with your colleagues across the hall as you both are making changes to improve early childhood programming for children and families. While we recognize that full-joint committee meetings are difficult to schedule, we urge you to consider the creation of an early childhood subcommittee that would contain members of each committee to work together to review bills that are interrelated to jointly supports an early childhood system.

We urge you to support this legislation to support the needs of families and educators. Thank you for your time and consideration. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have about this legislation.

High Quality Care

Rising Stars for ME

Children Served

Licensed Providers

Number of Children Receiving Subsidy by Age Group

The goal of the Child Care Subsidy Program is to support access to early childhood education services for eligible families. This report shows the number of children being supported by the subsidy program.

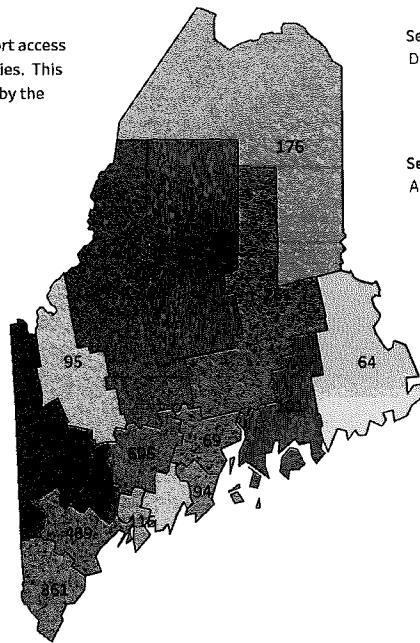
Point in Time Data

Select Month
December 2025

Select Age Group
All

State Totals

Age Group	
Infant	50
Toddler	710
PRESCHOOL	1,167
School Age	1,371



The Child Care Subsidy Program is primarily funded by the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) and provides early childhood education subsidies to eligible low-income families allowing parents to work or participate in educational or training programs. In addition, the Child Care Subsidy program works to enhance early childhood education quality and availability.

For more information about the Child Care Subsidy Program, please visit our website at: <https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/ocfs/ec/occhs/step.htm>

For more information on Rising Stars for ME, please visit the Child Care Choices website at: <https://childcarechoices.me/index.php/quality-rating-and-improvement-system/>

For a list of acronyms and meanings, please visit this page: <https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/ocfs/cbhs/acronyms.shtml>

Data Source: Maine Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Child and Family Services. Data is refreshed monthly and prior months are subject to change. For data prior to April 2023, please see https://public.tableau.com/views/D_3_archive/CC?:language=en-US&display_count=n&origin=viz_share_link