



January 21, 2026

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyers and Honorable Members of the Health and Human Services Committee.

I join you today on behalf of the Maine Women's Lobby. For over forty years, the Maine Women's Lobby has worked to build gender justice in Maine through legislative advocacy and systems change.

We are here today in support of **LD 1414 An Act to Support and Sustain Maine's Child Care Workforce** and thank President Daughtry for sponsoring this important bill, and **LD 2066 An Act to Establish the Child Care Employment Award** and thank Senator Ingwersen for sponsoring this important bill.

A functioning child care infrastructure has a multiplier effect across our state, communities, and economy: Families rely on child care for their children in order for parents to be able to go to their jobs and make the wage to pay for child care. Child care centers are employers who must adequately pay their workers in order to provide their services. And, many child care providers are also parents whose children must have the care they need in order for their parents to be at work. Together, these bills and the programs they support precisely target these needs by improving workforce compensation, and making care accessible to care workers.

However, the current economics around the child care industry don't add up, and it's often women who bear the brunt of this harm. Child care workers – the vast majority of whom are women – are continually amongst the lowest paid workers¹ while 40% of centers report being understaffed,² pushing women out of the workforce and into unpaid work. Our economy is predicated on all families being able to access affordable, high quality child care, including child care workers.

Each session, we chip away at addressing the various, overlapping challenges our child care infrastructure faces – These bills are key steps forward in those efforts and include important investments into the already proven CCAP program and the Employment Award pilot. Investing in these programs are not only key interventions and boons to families who qualify, but they also help to strengthen and stabilize the overall systems.

¹ Maine Permanent Commission on the Status of Women. Biennial Report 2024.

<https://www.maine.gov/sos/sites/maine.gov.sos/files/content/assets/MaineStatusOfWomenReport2024FINAL-1.pdf?eml=3e666974-36f5-f011-8d4c-0022482d279b&emdi=330da03b-38f5-f011-8d4c-0022482d279b&cld=6024660>

² Bishop, S., & Russell, K. (2022). Child Care Providers: The Workforce Behind the Workforce in Maine. In *StrongNation*. Council For A Strong America.

<https://strongnation.s3.amazonaws.com/documents/1484/7279c99c-ee80-41a4-b074-a778fc77361c.pdf?1645731841&inline;filename=%22Child%20Care%20Providers:%20The%20Workforce%20Behind%20the%20Workforce%20in%20Maine%20.pdf%22>

We cannot continue to underinvest in this critical element of our economy. Without clear efforts to recruit workers into a workforce they feel confident can support them, coupled with efforts to retain these workers, our care systems will fall through. When this happens, it is almost entirely women who pick up the pieces by stepping out of the workforce to provide unpaid care for loved ones, forgoing years of contributions to social security or retirement savings. **The effects are even more stark when we consider race and racism, and the effects on Black, brown, and Indigenous women.³**

We urge your support for these measures as part of a comprehensive strategy that recognizes the value of early educators while advancing gender equity across our communities.

We hope you will vote Ought to Pass.

Destie Hohman Sprague
Maine Women's Lobby

³ Boston Indicators (2022). Care Work in Massachusetts: A Call for Racial and Economic Justice for a Neglected Sector. Retrieved from https://www.bostonindicators.org/reports/report-detail-pages/care_work