

Testimony in Support of**LD 2066, An Act to Establish the Child Care Employment Award****LD 1414, An Act to Support and Sustain Maine's Child Care Workforce***January 21, 2026*

Sen. Ingwersen, Rep. Meyer, and members of the Health and Human Services Committee, my name is Maura Pillsbury and I am a policy analyst at Maine Center for Economic Policy. We are testifying today in support of LD 1414 & LD 2066.

The Child Care Employment Award provides a \$200 monthly wage supplement to help early childhood educators with young children afford the cost of child care. LD 2066 builds on the successful two-year pilot of this program by making it permanent. LD 1414 would increase salary supplements for workers providing care to children up to the age of three.

The current program will end June 30, 2026. Ending this program could cause the child care system to lose hundreds of qualified child care workers, which would have ripple effects for many more. Capacity and demand for this program has far exceeded supply. Without additional support for this program, affordable child care will fall out of reach for many Maine families.

This proposal would make Maine's child care system and economy stronger. According to US Census Bureau data, tens of thousands of Mainers cite a lack of available child care as the primary reason they aren't in the labor force. Caring for a family member is one of the primary reasons people are unable to enter the workforce. When child care is unavailable or unaffordable, Mainers leave the workforce. This particularly impacts women and rural areas in our state. Ending this program will push even more parents — especially mothers — out of the workforce, limiting economic growth and reducing household incomes.

Low wages make it extremely difficult for child care centers to recruit and retain staff. Yet child care centers cannot raise prices more to cover high wages because parents are already struggling to afford care. We need wage subsidies because the market doesn't work on its own. Child care workers are among the lowest paid workers in our state, making on average less than fast food workers and less than 60% of what kindergarten teachers are paid,¹ although many child care workers hold early childhood education degrees and prepare young children to attend school. 43% of child care workers in Maine rely on public benefits to help make ends meet, while 38% of centers report staffing

shortages that limit the number of slots available to families.ⁱ Infant child care is only affordable to 14% of families, based on the US DHHS definition of affordability. A child care worker would have to spend 38% of their earnings to put their own child in infant care.ⁱⁱⁱ

Child care workers play a critical role in our society. This program is an investment in the future of Maine's economy and workforce, and we urge the Committee to support it, as well as strongly advocating for its inclusion in the supplemental budget.

Thank you for your time. I would be happy to answer any questions.

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ⁱ US Bureau of Labor Statistics. Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics. May 2024.

<https://www.bls.gov/oes/tables.htm>

ⁱⁱ National Association for the Education of Young Children. Maine 2025 Fact Sheet.

<https://www.naeyc.org/our-work/public-policy-advocacy/state-fact-sheets-2025>

ⁱⁱⁱ Economic Policy Institute. "Child care costs in the United States: The cost of child care in Maine." Feb 2025. <https://www.epi.org/child-care-costs-in-the-united-states/#/ME>