



Department of the Secretary of State Maine Permanent Commission on the Status of Women



JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

L.D. 2066 “An Act to Establish the Child Care Employment Award”

Testimony of Elinor Higgins

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January 21, 2026

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, Members of the Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Elinor Higgins. I am a resident of Portland, and I am the Executive Director of Maine’s Permanent Commission on the Status of Women, which is part of the Department of Secretary of State. The Commission is a government appointed group, created in state statute to improve opportunities and life outcomes for women and girls. The Commission produces biennial reports on the status of women and girls and advises the Governor and members of the Legislature about policy and social issues affecting women across Maine. Today, I am speaking on behalf of the Commission and its Policy and Legislation Committee in support of L.D. 2066 “An Act to Establish the Child Care Employment Award.”

Child care has long been a priority for the Commission, both because of its role in supporting better economic outcomes for Maine women and Maine families, but also because of the predominantly female workforce that provides education and care for Maine children.¹ In December 2024, the Commission released a report on Maine women’s labor and economic security.² In that report, we celebrated several significant state investments aimed at bolstering the child care workforce and child care providers while also improving affordability for families. However, the Commission’s findings also highlighted ongoing challenges:

- According to the U.S. Current Population Survey, Maine women are more likely than Maine men to cite child care issues as a barrier to full time work.
- In 2024, the average cost of center-based child care for an infant in Maine reached \$15,730.³
- The high cost of child care is one key driver of Maine women dropping out of the workforce or opting for part-time work – a reality that has lasting economic impacts across the lifespan.
- As with other traditionally female-dominated care work professions, low pay is a key driver of worker shortages and retention challenges in early childhood education.

¹ Maine Permanent Commission on the Status of Women. (2023). “White Paper: Maine Needs Quality, Affordable Child Care.” Available at: <https://www.maine.gov/sos/sites/maine.gov.sos/files/content/assets/PCSW-20Childcare-20White-20Page-202023-20Final-20011724-1.pdf>

² Maine Permanent Commission on the Status of Women. (2024). “A Report on Maine Women’s Labor and Economic Security.” Available at: <https://www.maine.gov/sos/womens-comm/documents/MaineStatusOfWomenReport2024.pdf>.

Note: Data cited throughout this testimony is drawn from the report – please see link above for further citations and information.

³ Child Care Aware of America. (2024). “Child Care in America: 2024 Price & Supply Report.” Available at: <https://info.childcareaware.org/hubfs/Pricing%20and%20Landscape%20Infograms/Pricing%20Sheets%20PDF/2024-2025-price-fact-sheet-child-care-affordability-Maine.pdf>

- All counties in Maine face a gap between available child care services and the number of children that need care.
- A 2023 study found that the lack of reliable child care for working parents of children under age 3 could cost the state as much as \$403 million annually.⁴

L.D. 2066 would build on previous successes to stabilize the child care workforce and retain talented early childhood educators by addressing child care costs for educators with children of their own. This type of investment makes it possible for women and parents to stay in this critical field that underpins the broader Maine economy.

The Maine Permanent Commission on the Status of Women is in support of L.D. 2066. We appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony today. Thank you again for your time and attention.

⁴ Council for a Strong America: Ready Nation. (2023). "The Growing, Annual Cost of the Infant-Toddler Child Care Crisis in Maine." Available at: <https://strongnation.s3.amazonaws.com/documents/1646/3097bc0d-bb8f-4433-8ad7-1c0f97f1f317.pdf?1681153184&inline;%20filename=%22The%20Growing.%20Annual%20Cost%20of%20the%20Infant-Toddler%20Child%20Care%20Crisis%20in%20Maine.pdf%22>