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

LD 2066: An Act to Establish the Child Care Employment Award

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 2066.

Collectively, the 15 YMCAs in Maine are the largest childcare provider in the state. We serve thousands of children in our early childhood education programs, before/ afterschool programs, and summer camp. These programs provide children with safe, nurturing and enriching care, and are a critical component of our state's infrastructure to support working parents and our economy.

For our member YMCAs, the Child Care Employment Award is a critical investment in our most important asset – the skilled early educators that teach our state's children and allow us to offer consistent care for working families. Maine's pilot of the Child Care Employment Award has been a resounding success, but demand for the awards is high and many people are not able to access the benefit due to the limited funding. Establishing the program permanently with ongoing funding is an important step in the right direction.

Maine's child care system depends on a stable, qualified workforce, yet child care employees are among the lowest-paid workers in the state. The Employment Award directly addresses one of the top reasons educators leave the field: inability to afford care for their own children. As of September 2025, the program supports 511 children from 313 working families, meaning hundreds of child care educators are able to remain employed in licensed programs because of this support.

The demand for the program is high, with 470 children from 312 families currently on the waitlist. These are child care employees who qualify for the benefit, but are unable to access it due to limited funds. Child care providers are left to foot the bill if they want to subsidize child care costs for those employees and if they need to raise revenue to cover those costs, they must increase fees to families.

Recruiting and retaining qualified staff has been an incredible challenge for Maine's YMCAs and impacts the number of children the Ys can serve. Consistency is key when it comes to working with children, and the more consistent we are with staffing, the stronger our programs are. State-funded salary supplements are a critical way to provide better compensation for caring, qualified educators, while ensuring that childcare programs do not need to pass the wage increases along to families.

Establishing the Child Care Employment Award as permanent program and providing ongoing funding will help bolster Maine's child care system statewide. Child care providers and eligible employees will know they are able to rely on this program from year to year. This certainty will be invaluable to providers and child care employees alike.

Given these reasons, we strongly support LD 2066 and urge the Committee to vote "Ought to Pass."

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Clara McConnell

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