



Testimony in Support of LD 2066

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

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

1/21/2026

My name is Jennifer Szantyr, and I am the Executive Director of Oxford SACC from Oxford, Norway, Otisfield and Paris, Maine. I am writing to express support for LD 2066: An Act to Establish the Child Care Employment Award. The Child Care Employment Award is not just a benefit for educators. It is critical infrastructure that supports Maine's workforce and economy. When child care employees cannot afford to care for their own children, they leave the field. When they leave, programs lose staff, classrooms close, and working parents lose care.

Recently, we held a professional development day at Oxford SACC focused on professionalism, education, and our commitment to children and families. As I prepared for that day, I kept thinking about the enormous expectations placed on early childhood educators. They are required to complete 30 or more hours of professional development each year, meet strict licensing and safety standards, and do far more than care for children. Yet despite these expectations, early childhood educators are not compensated as the professionals they are.

Historically, many child care programs, including ours, have tried to support staff by offering reduced tuition or employee discounts. But with rising operating costs like our liability insurance, food, utilities, and supplies, programs can no longer absorb those discounts at the levels we once could. At the same time, we cannot keep raising tuition on families to try to pay staff a livable wage. That is simply not sustainable.

This is where the Child Care Employment Award matters.

In our rural Oxford Hills community, this award has become one of the few tools we have to remain competitive with higher-paying industries in our community. When the Employment Award first became available, our staff applied on the very first day, and many were immediately placed on a waiting list. That alone shows how critical this support is.

Today, seven of my employees are eligible for the Employment Award, but only one is receiving it due to limited funding. LD 2066 would give programs like ours one more meaningful benefit to offer, helping our educators afford care for their own children and allowing them to stay in the field. Supporting LD 2066 is an investment in child care workers, working families, and Maine's economy. I urge you to support this bill and help ensure that the people caring for Maine's children can afford to remain in this profession.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Warm regards,


Jeri Szantyr