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February 18<sup>th</sup>, 2026

Re: Supplemental Budget Proposal Hearing; Children's Services

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and the members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services and the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee,

My name is Victoria Forkus, and I serve as the Managing Director of the Maine Community Action Partnership (MeCAP). Our network administers nine of Maine's eleven Head Start grants and serves thousands of low-income families every year. We have seen firsthand the positive impact of the CCAP program and strongly request the inclusion of a sustainable and ongoing funding source in the supplemental budget, in the amount of \$15 million annually.

I want to take a moment to discuss the impact on vulnerable families when the Child Care Affordability program is not accessible. Head Start is a federally funded and highly regulated program. This funding does not cover certain hours for parents in need of childcare during unconventional working hours. Many Head Start programs blend and braid their funding with the CCAP to provide wrap-around childcare for families who need extended coverage outside of traditional working hours.

When CCAP is not accessible, or when families wait months for assistance, the impact is immediate and can be severe. For some families, this could mean missed work or reduced hours, which can lead to lost wages or job loss. Many Head Start families are already living on the margins; any disruption in childcare could push them toward instability.

Based on income eligibility, most Head Start families are eligible for CCAP, and these are the families the program was designed to support. Head Start is an incredibly effective tool for combatting poverty, and this impact only increases when it can operate as a full-day, full-family support system. This is only possible when CCAP is funded and accessible.

That is why we are asking for \$15 million in ongoing annual funding for CCAP. This investment would move families off the waitlist, expand access to consistent, high-quality care, and ensure that the CCAP is sustainably funded into the future. This action further removes the uncertainty that families and childcare providers feel about the current status of the program.

CCAP allows parents to remain in the workforce, children to thrive, and Maine's communities to remain strong. It is paramount that we strengthen and stabilize CCAP through an ongoing funding source. Thank you for your time and for your commitment to this important issue.

Sincerely,

*Victoria D. Forkus*

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