

February 18, 2026

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RE: LD 2212, HP1491

An Act Making Supplemental Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2026, and June 30, 2027 -

Senator Rotundo
Senator Ingwersen
Representative Gattine
Representative Meyer
Honorable Members of this Joint Committee

My name is William Hager, I am a resident of Wells Maine and have the honor of representing Catholic Charities Maine and the two childcare programs we operate in Southern Maine. I am here to speak in strong support for the allocation of these additional funds to support the Maine Child Care System and those children, families and communities who rely so heavily on that system.

I would like to offer some historic perspective on public funding for childcare in Maine. I've been running childcare programs since 1977, and I've been driving up here to address the public systems for almost as long.

In my limited time here today, I'd like to give you some history and perspective on public funding for childcare.

- The childcare subsidy system goes back 50 years or more. Originally, the State would cobble together various Federal funding streams (anyone else here old enough to remember "Title XX" Community Block grant?) Federal childcare funding was codified in 1996 through the implementation of the "Child Care Development Block Grant" (CCDBG) and the "Child Care Development Fund" (CCDF) which created a single system, which gave us a dedicated Federal program that also incorporated State funding to support state level childcare initiatives.

- These programs have had bi-partisan support from their inception, and the Federal funds are still the largest funders of the childcare system in Maine.

- The primary use of these funds was, and still is, to assist families in meeting their childcare costs, which in turn would allow them to find, maintain, and/or train for employment.



- These Federal Funds were (and are) “block granted” to the states, and if they stay within certain Federal requirements, each state is allowed a fair amount of freedom in how they administered these programs.
- Over time, as the science of early brain development increased our understanding of what kinds of experiences these very young children needed to succeed in life, both the Federal and State side of this block grant acknowledged the need to invest a portion of these funds in both increasing the quality and capacity of childcare.
- I can tell you in all honesty that every meaningful advance we have made in Maine around increasing the number of available slots and/or the quality of childcare in Maine, has been the result of significant investments in State funding.
- Unfortunately, state funding for childcare has been, to be kind, wildly inconsistent. Investment in the early 2000s lead to an unprecedented increase in childcare numbers and quality. When these investments were eroded significantly in the 2010s, available childcare numbers dropped. The math is pretty simple.
- For those who might think that this is something that either the market or business community should be addressing, I would stress that this need for childcare is, basically, a public infrastructures need, like roads and sewers. And, like roads and sewers, it requires a governmental response.
- Specifically, for those who feel that business should be stepping up to support this need for expanded childcare in our communities: I would agree, however, given the fact that there are very few local employers with enough size to make a meaningful difference. Large national chains do not have such investments in their business plan; however, I might point out that Walmart may well be the single greatest beneficiary of the childcare subsidy system. I might also point out that the state did at one time, fund both incentives for Maine businesses to invest in childcare and a regional system of support programs with the mandate to increase business investments. Both programs were eliminated by state budget cuts.

I would conclude by saying that, in my own personal journey, I found myself working in childcare, with pre-school children in the context of the family because I found it was the best way for me to have the greatest positive impact on my community. I would suggest that this holds true for you as policy makers. There may be no greater impact you can have on the future of our state than investing in our youngest children and their families.

I am available for any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

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Some Background and Definitions per Child Care Funding:

The bulk of funding for childcare in Maine comes from the Federal Government via the Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG) a sub-section of the Child Care Development Fund (CCDF.) These two terms are often used interchangeably, but this is the distinction:

Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG)

CCDBG has been around since 1996 and was born out of the “Personal Work and Responsibility Act (commonly referred to as “Welfare Reform) and has been the Federal Program that provides states with funds specifically to provide financial supports to needed to find, maintain or train for employment. At its point of origin, CCDBG was developed specifically to help families avoid other, more expensive forms of public supports. It has been amended since that time to where it now can also be used to increase the overall quality and availability of childcare services within the state. CCDBG is a “discretionary grant program” which means that, while there are some specific Federal guidelines, individual states have a fair amount of flexibility in the use of these funds. States are required to submit an annual plan to the Federal Government for approval on how these funds are administered.

Child Care Development Fund (CCDF)

CCDF is the broader term for funding coming into the state for supporting childcare. While funds from the CCDBG focuses on providing subsidies for families, CCDF includes additional funds related to childcare access and quality.

Key Conditions of CCDF/CCDBG funding for childcare subsidies in Maine:

1. A family must be defined as a “Working Family” (i.e., two parents, both of whom are working or in an approved educational program.
2. A family must prove they are under state income guidelines.
3. The family CANNOT be receiving TANF benefits (childcare for TANF families can be provided by the TANF block grant.)
4. The family must provide documentation that they are Maine Residents.
5. The family must provide documentation that the children are U.S. citizens.
6. Families must update this documentation at least annually.
7. The amounts, types and frequency of eligibility documentation required in Maine exceeds the current Federal requirements, and as such, Maine’s federal childcare funding is not in jeopardy.
8. This program is NOT and “Entitlement,” which is to say, the state is NOT obligated to provide a childcare subsidy to every eligible family. If the number of families exceed the available funds, additional families are placed on a waiting list.