



## Right from the Start Policy **WINS** 2019-2024 by issue area

### Child Care

Just 3 years ago, Maine spent very little money on child care – less than \$2 million.

For the past several years, state funding and improvements for child care have been a top Right from the Start (RFTS) priority. As a result, in 2024 – Maine’s General Fund allocated \$50.5 million for child care, surpassing the federal CCDBG annual investment of \$33.7 million. This success was truly historic and is the culmination of many years of advocacy and policy work led by RFTS, resulting in:

- \$31.2 million in wage support for child care providers – the workforce behind Maine’s workforce
- \$10.2 million to increase family eligibility for child care subsidy to 125% SMI (previously 85%)
- \$2.5 million to create a scholarship program for child care workers’ children needing child care
- \$3.6 million funding increase to the already allocated \$3 million in General Fund spending for Head Start. This new funding increases Head Start eligibility from 100% of poverty to 185%

During the pandemic, the Maine Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS) put in place a \$200 monthly wage stipend for child care workers using federal ARPA relief funds. In 2022 Maine allocated \$15 million in General Funds to make the \$200 monthly wage stipends permanent. In 2023 Maine doubled the wage stipends funding to \$31.2 million; and beginning in November 2023 tiered those payments so that Tier 1 providers receive a monthly wage stipend of \$275; Tier 2 providers receive a monthly wage stipend of \$415; and Tier 3 providers receive a monthly wage stipend of \$625. **NOTE:** beginning 7/1/24, and because of increased utilization, these tiered levels will change: Tier 1 providers will receive a monthly wage stipend of \$240; Tier 2 providers will receive a monthly wage stipend of \$360; and Tier 3 providers will receive a monthly wage stipend of \$540. The tiered wage stipends are working as incentives to help increase quality. Today, twice as many family child care providers achieved the highest quality levels compared to 2018.

Child Care Infrastructure grants using federal APRA funds: as of June 2024, OCFS has awarded \$11.7 million of \$15.2 million in child care infrastructure grants to 202 programs across all 16 counties –

- 84 grants are to start new family child care programs;
- 37 grants are to start new center-based child care programs
- 77 grants are to expand existing center-based child care programs
- Collectively, these grants are expected to create 4,715 new child care slots

**Annual investment: \$50.5 million General Fund; \$15.2 million federal ARPA grants over 2-3 years.**

## **Federal Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG)**

The Child Care Development Block Grant is the primary federal funding source of child care for children under 13 from low-income working families. The majority of these funds serve children under 6. Each year, RFTS leadership and partners work with Maine's federal delegation seeking increased CCDBG funding. The most recent CCDBG funding for Maine was \$33.7 million.

Maine CCDBG facts:

- 35% of Maine children birth-6, or roughly 27,000 children, are eligible for CCDBG
- Only 12%, or roughly 3300, of eligible children are currently served, due to lack of funding.
- 67% of children under age 6 live in families in which all parents are working
- Due to low reimbursements and delayed payments by OCFS, only 1226 Maine child care providers accept CCDBG subsidies

NOTE: In Maine CCDBG funding is also used in this manner: \$1.6 million to support First 4 ME; \$5 million to support Maine Roads to Quality Professional Development Network; and \$1.5 million to support the Early Childhood Consultation Partnerships.

**Annual investment: \$33.7 CCDBG federal funding, \$4.2 required CCDBG state match.**

## **Head Start**

Head Start is a federal-to-local program that promotes the school readiness of children from birth to age five from the lowest-income families by enhancing their cognitive, social, and emotional development. Federal Head Start funds only program for children and families at or below poverty. Head Start emphasizes the role of parents as their child's first and most important teacher. These programs help build relationships with families that support family well-being and many other important areas. Each year part RFTS partners seek continued and increased Head Start funding from Maine's members of Congress.

**Annual investment: \$48 million federal funding; \$7 million in state funding, including a \$3.6 million increase in 2023**

**Total child care investments in Maine is \$155 million: \$58.1 million General Funds; \$33.7 million federal CCDBG and TANF child care; \$15.2 million ARPA child care infrastructure grants (time limited) and \$48 million in federal Head Start.**

## **Public PreK (defined as 4-year-olds)**

In 2023 RFTS Tier-1 priority legislation was approved that created a Special Commission to Study the Initiatives, Incentives, and Progress to Expand Public Preschool Programs, and to report those findings to the Maine Legislature. The Commission found that, ***"It is the goal of the State to establish an equitable, mixed-delivery public preschool system that provides universal access for preschool-aged children and their families in accordance with the following timeline: 60% by the 2024- 2025 school year; 80% by the 2025-2026 school year; and 100% by the 2026-2027 school year."***

As noted in the 2023 Measures of Growth Report, published by the Maine Economic Growth Council, the percentage of School Administrative Units with at least one public prekindergarten classroom has risen drastically in the last two decades, from 24% in the early 2000's to 86% this past school year. This expansion is due in large part to the funding opportunities over the past few years.

In the 2023/24 school year, just 6,289 Maine 4-year-olds were enrolled in public PreK, representing 50% of all 4-year-olds. This is an increase of 14 percent since 2017. (Note: there was a large decline in public PreK enrollment during the 2021 and 2022 pandemic years. Enrollment has now surpassed pre-pandemic 2020 level). Much work will need to be done to meet the PreK Commission's enrollment goals.

The Maine state budget supports a \$34 million annual investment in public PreK (much of which is through the school funding formula) and a \$27.8 million local share. This averages about \$5400 per student.

164 of Maine's 193 School Administrative Units (86%) offer public PreK.

There remains geographic disparity in public PreK. In Aroostook and Washington Counties 83% of 4-year-olds are in public PreK; in Cumberland and Waldo Counties only 27-30% of 4-year-olds are enrolled.

42% of Maine's public PreK programs operate for 25 hours or more each week.

Approximately 50 School Administrative Units (SAUs) have one or more mixed delivery community partnerships for their public PreK programs, 43 of which include Head Start. (All Maine Head Start programs participate.) This is an increase from 39 SAUs in the 2022-23 school year.

Increasing mixed delivery public PreK is a goal and focus for Maine's PreK Expansion Grants, which were funded through Maine's Jobs and Recovery Program using federal ARPA funds. 31 SAUs were awarded over \$7 million in PreK expansion grant funds, creating new capacity for 931 students. Thirteen of the grantees are in mixed delivery partnerships. Twenty-eight of the 31 SAUs receiving grant funds now offer full day/full week programming through this expansion opportunity.

The public PreK expansion grants are part of Maine DOE work funded with \$10 million through the Maine Jobs and Recovery Plan to develop and administer a PreK Expansion Grant program. These grants have supported new program start-ups and expansion of current programs, with priority given to programs expanding from part-day/part-week to full day/full-week programming, expansions happening through partnerships with community providers, and programs at SAUs with higher percentages of economic need.

In 2023 Maine DHHS and DOE were awarded a 3-year \$8 million per year (\$24 million total) federal Preschool Development Grant – with the goal of **continuing to build needed infrastructure and capacity to create a more coordinated, efficient, and high-quality mixed delivery system for Maine children birth-age 5**. The overall goal is to ensure children enter kindergarten prepared to succeed.

Much of this work really began in 2024 and Maine has been granted a no-cost 1 year extension so this grant will run through 2026.

Maine's public PreK programs meet 9 of the 10 NIEER quality benchmarks.

A RFTS priority, Maine has commissioned a Cost of Care study and fiscal mapping model for child care and public PreK.

Maine is creating a whole child focused Kindergarten Entry Inventory (KEI) and piloting it in fall of school years 25/26 and 26/27.

Under a MDOE initiative, seven (7) First 10 Community School Pilots will be funded by spring 2024. First 10 partners elementary schools, early childhood programs, and community providers to improve children's (birth-age 10) learning and care.

**Total annual state investments in public PreK is \$34 million; \$8 million PDG grant; and limited time \$10 million in expansion grants.**

#### **Other ECE programs championed by RFTS**

##### **Early Childhood Consultation Program (ECCP)**

**The Maine Early Childhood Consultation Partnership (ECCP®)** is an infant and early childhood mental health consultation program that addresses the social-emotional needs of children birth to age eight (0-8) by offering support, education, and consultation to the adults who provide care for them. ECCP® provides strategies, support, and training to improve the capacity of early childhood education and childcare providers as they work with children who have challenging behaviors or social-emotional concerns. ECCP® also incorporates brief consultation to families (including resource families) of children referred for support through the child's early childhood education setting.

Passed as a RFTS legislative priority in 2019, ECCP® first began in five Maine Counties. In 2021 it was expanded to then serve eight counties. In 2022 ECCP® was expanded statewide.

**Annual investment: \$3 million (split between Maine's General Fund and CCDBG federal funding)**

##### **HELP ME GROW**

Passed as a legislative initiative in 2021, Help Maine Grow is a comprehensive, statewide system of early identification, referral, and follow-up for all children from prenatal care up to 8 years of age and their families, which increases access and referrals to early intervention services.

**Annual investment: \$1 million**

##### **FIRST 4 ME**

Passed as a RFTS legislative priority in 2021, the First 4 ME Early Care and Education Program is designed to improve social, emotional, educational, and health outcomes for children under 6 years of age, contributing to the provision of comprehensive, high-quality early childcare and education.

This legislation allocated \$5 million for up to 5 pilot programs. Given relays at DHHS/OCFS – 4 pilots sites were selected in May 2023 and launched in late 2023: one in Aroostook County, one in York County, one in Portland and one in Lewiston-Auburn.

Annual investment: \$3.2 million (\$1.6 million from the General Fund; \$1.6 million from CCFBG)

**Total annual investments Other ECE Programs: \$4.1 General Fund; \$3.1 CCDBG**

#### **Data Collection, Strategic Planning and Financing**

- \$5M invested in 2024 in IT support at OCFS to better and more quickly administer child care programs and payments
- \$200,000 in 2023 funded Maine’s Child Care and PreK Cost of Care Study
- \$200,000 in 2023 for a study to be led by the Children’s Cabinet to report back to the legislature on what investments would be needed so that no family pays more than 7% of family income for child care
- \$100,000 in 2023 for a report on Early Childhood Integrated Data System
- 2023 Study to examine reorganization of DHHS – specifically programs serving Maine’s children
- \$24 million federal Preschool Development Grant for 3-years (\$8 million year 2024-2026) with many planning elements

**Total one-time investments: \$5.5 million (NOTE: PDG grant accounted for above – see Public PreK)**

#### ***Key Advocacy Strategies That Supported These ECE Advancements***

##### ***Children’s Caucuses***

In 2018 the RFTS Coalition created the Maine Children’s Caucus, working with then Senator Rebecca Millett. This was the sixth Children’s Caucus nationally (today there was many more). The Children’s Caucus has the longest history, and arguable some of the strongest outcomes, of any Caucus of the Maine Legislature. Some prominent presenters to Children’s Caucuses have been Federal Reserve Bank national economist Rob Grunewald, several national brain scientists from the Harvard Center on the Developing Child, panels of CSA’s community leaders, panels of child care/ECE providers, and several national experts on ECE systems change, financing and strategies. Here is quick overview of the caucuses each legislative year:

128<sup>th</sup> Maine Legislative Session (2017-2018)

Senate Chair Senator Rebecca Millett (D), Cumberland Count

House Chair Representative Matt Pouliot (R), Augusta

Ten (10) 2017 Caucus Sessions

Six (6) 2018 Caucus Sessions

129th Maine Legislative Session (2019-2020)

Senate Chair Senator Rebecca Millett (D), Cumberland Count

House Chair Representative Sawin Millett (R), Waterford

Ten (10) 2019 Caucus Sessions

Five (5) 2020 Caucus Sessions

130 Maine Legislative Session (2021-2022)

Senate Chair Senator Rick Bennett (R), Oxford County

House Chair Rebecca Millett (D), Cape Elizabeth

Nine (9) 2021 Caucus Sessions

Five (5) 2022 Caucus Sessions

131 Maine Legislative Session (2023-2024)

Senate Chair Senator Rick Bennett (R), Oxford County

House Chair Rebecca Millett (D), Cape Elizabeth

Eight (8) 2023 Caucus Sessions

Four (4) 2024 Caucus Session (one January session was cancelled due to weather/conflict)

***Earn Media***

Published and broadcast earned media in the voices of our RFTS partners is one of the coalition's greatest strengths – averaging more than 100 earned media impressions each year across statewide print and broadcast outlets.