

The youth of today are the workforce of tomorrow.

Mid-Maine Chamber partners with ReadyNation that advocates nationally on issues affecting child care. Here is a recent update provided by State Director Kim Gore:

Just about every year ReadyNation asks Congress to increase funding for the federal Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG) to assist more lower income working parents with child care needs. At the end of December, Congress did just that – passing a \$550M increase for CCDBG.

We now know that this means Maine will receive approximately \$8M in new CCDBG funding.

Using the recent needs assessment and strategic plan completed under the federal Preschool Dev. Planning Grant, DHHS' Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS) has shared plans for how this new funding will be used to best meet the specific needs of ME children/families. These include:

Expanding infant and rural child care

Multiple assessments have identified the need for additional infant care statewide and child care for all ages in rural areas. As a result, OCFS will:

- Waive licensing fees for child care providers in rural areas and fees for any new providers statewide serving infants;
- Provide a weekly stipend of up to \$100 per infant to all licensed providers participating in the Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), that are in compliance with health and safety requirements and are providing full- or part-time care;
- Provide \$1M in mini grants to providers opening new facilities or expanding a current facility. Priority will be given to providers in rural areas.

Improving child care quality

Another primary focus is the need to improve the quality of child care statewide. OCFS will:

- Fund \$1M in mini grants to assist providers in moving up the quality rating system.
- Provide a 10% “quality bump” payment for providers participating in ME’s quality rating system and in compliance with health and safety requirements that are serving infants and toddlers.
- Provide parents a reduced co-pay when choosing programs at Step 3 or 4 on the quality rating system.

Expanding child care capacity

OCFS will:

- Set aside \$2M to help ensure ME continues to provide child care subsidies without a waiting list for the program. ME is one of a handful of states nationwide that currently has no waiting list for subsidy.
- Provide \$200,000 to the ME Assoc. for the Education of Young Children to operate the T.E.A.C.H. early care and education scholarship program.

All of these actions are ones the Right from the Start Coalition, co-lead by Gore along with three other key partners, have recommended to Gov. Mills and her administration. We are thrilled to see these come to fruition.