

Policy Priorities for 2026

The Maine Children's Alliance advocates for sound public policies and promotes best practices to improve the lives of Maine children, youth, and families.

In the second regular session of the 132nd Maine Legislature, MCA is committed to elevating the voices and interests of Maine children, youth, and families. Our priorities focus on important investments to improve the many systems of support children, youth, and families depend on for their health, safety, and well-being.

Our state budget should sustain critical investments in a variety of supports and services that ensure children and their families have economic security, access to food, child care, and housing. Efforts should focus on strengthening children and families with the greatest needs.

Please follow the bills that will help move these priorities forward at [Maine Children's Alliance Legislative Bill Tracker](#)

Early Care and Education

Vision: All Maine children birth to age eight and their families have the resources, opportunities, and support needed to provide young children the foundation to thrive and meet their full potential. To achieve this vision, lawmakers should prioritize:

- **Protect, strengthen, and sustainably fund Maine's early childhood system** by increasing child care funding, advancing affordability initiatives, and securing long-term, stable investments by 2030.
- **Expand access to high-quality early learning**, including universal full-day public preschool, improving identification and access to services and care for children with disabilities, and increased infant and toddler care—especially in underserved and rural communities.
- **Strengthen and retain Maine's early childhood workforce** through higher wages, benefits, career pathways, professional development, and continued investment in the Salary Supplement System and Child Care Employment Award.
- **Begin plans for a coordinated, integrated early childhood system** that unifies early learning, family support, child well-being, early intervention, and resource hubs under strong statewide leadership.
- **Invest in the infrastructure and capacity needed for a thriving system**, including access to educators and health care providers, improved reporting and Child Find systems, community resource hubs, and data-informed approaches to workforce and child care supply expansion.

Child Safety & Well-being

Vision: All Maine children have a safe, permanent home, and receive quality physical, oral, and mental health care that is accessible and affordable for their families. To achieve this vision, lawmakers should prioritize:

- **Implement and strengthen statutory changes clarifying child abuse and neglect**, including distinguishing poverty from neglect and decoupling SEI notifications from child welfare involvement, with clear rules, training, and practice support for mandated reporters and child welfare staff.
- **Increase investments in upstream, community-based supports for families**, including Prevention Councils, community navigators, and local entities that promote community conditions that support family health, safety, and well-being.
- **Expand access to mental health and substance use services across the continuum** for parents and caregivers, ensuring families can access needed support without entering crisis or child welfare systems.
- **Strengthen a prevention-focused child and family well-being system** by educating policymakers on the value of upstream investment and promoting policies that center family preservation, community support, and effective intervention.
- **Monitor and support implementation of systemic reforms**, including the Department of Justice settlement and related state actions, and identify additional opportunities to improve outcomes for children and families.

Health and Healthcare

Vision: Every child has equitable, affordable, and seamless access to comprehensive health and behavioral health care that supports their ability to grow, learn, and thrive. To achieve this vision, lawmakers should prioritize:

- **Protect access to affordable healthcare** by mitigating the impact of federal cuts and ensuring continued availability of Medicaid and Marketplace coverage for Maine families.
- **Expand outreach and reduce barriers to health insurance access**, with a focus on underserved and marginalized communities.
- **Strengthen preventive care** by integrating dental care into overall health services and increasing access to Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic, and Treatment (EPSDT).
- **Advance access to early substance use prevention** by implementing evidence-based programs that reach children and youth at younger ages.
- **Improve behavioral health supports for children and youth** by expanding access to mental health services, supporting safe spaces, enhancing data collection, and ensuring accountability across Maine's behavioral health continuum.

Family Economic Security

Vision: All Maine children and families have access to the resources they need to stay out of poverty and achieve economic stability. This includes safe, affordable housing; free school meals; and improved access to safety net services. To achieve this vision, lawmakers should prioritize:

- **Strengthen food security for children and families** by protecting SNAP eligibility, expanding outreach, ensuring year-round meal access, and maintaining state investment in universal school meals.

- **Reduce child poverty** through targeted economic supports, including cash assistance, enhanced tax credits, housing and food supports, and policies that expand access to living-wage jobs for parents and caregivers.
- **Expand access to stable and affordable housing** by investing in new construction, emergency shelters, rent relief, and long-term housing solutions that meet both immediate and future community needs.
- **Promote collaborative community supports**, including the community school model, to link students and families with essential resources such as healthy food, education, and wraparound services that strengthen families.
- **Improve transportation affordability and access** by subsidizing public transit, supporting low-cost transportation for essential needs, and advancing community-based solutions that reduce transportation burdens for families.

Equity

Vision: All children and families in Maine have access to the resources they need to reach their full potential, within systems that provide equitable opportunities to thrive. To achieve this vision, lawmakers should prioritize:

- Protecting Wabanaki rights by restoring self-government to tribes in Maine.
- Defending access to low-cost health care coverage for all Mainers.
- Ensuring statewide access to essential mental health and substance use services.

Investment in Children and Families

Vision: The state budget should reflect a value of robust investment in the programs, services, and systems that support the health and well-being of children, youth, and families across our state.

We urge policymakers and state leaders to invest in a supplemental budget that recognizes and responds to the challenges of the moment, prioritizes the important role that children and families play in our state, and acknowledges ongoing inequities that must be addressed. Lawmakers should prioritize:

- Increasing investment in substance use and mental health services to respond to the significant needs of children, youth, and families across the state.
- Increasing investments in child care and Early Head Start/Head Start to support the early care and education needs of children and families by addressing the waitlist to the Child Care Affordability Program and funding the Child Care Employment Award.
- Ensuring the Fund for a Healthy Maine is sustainable, to continue to support key health and prevention services for children and families in Maine.

We also urge lawmakers to take action to mitigate the impact of recent federal changes to health care, food assistance, and more (HR 1), that pass significant costs and administrative burdens back onto states and threaten the health and well-being of many Mainers. Efforts to utilize the Budget Stabilization Fund to shore up critical health care and food assistance Mainers depend on should be considered. Now is a critical moment for Maine elected officials to step up to ensure Mainers continue to have opportunities to meet their basic and essential needs.

Children live in families, families live in communities, and communities make up our great state – each is dependent on the other to achieve shared success. Together, we can create state policies and investments that reflect our values, provide healthy futures for our children, and offer greater opportunity for all.