

Testimony of Jennifer Vachon
Owner of Parkside Children's Learning Center

In support of LD 258, "An Act Making Unified 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, 2023, June 30, 2024 and June 30, 2025"

(Governor's Bill) Sponsored by Representative Melanie Sachs

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs, and
the Joint Standing Committee on on Health and Human Services

Tuesday, February 21, 2023, State House Room 228

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, members of the Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs, and Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, members of the Health and Human Services, my name is Jennifer Vachon, I am the owner of Parkside Children's Learning Center in Bangor.

Initiative: Provides funding to annualize funds received in Public Law 2021, chapter 635 for salary supplements awarded to individuals who provide childcare or are early childhood educators.

I'm testifying to support the salary supplement investments for early childhood educators working in child care programs. I'm also asking for you to increase the investments in this salary supplement program.

Costs of living continues to increase. I have an employee who lives paycheck to paycheck. She works a full-time job. She is an amazing toddler teacher! She commutes about 20 miles each way to work a day. And I know that she is doing her very best to create a budget for herself with the pay that she receives: her hourly wage is \$18.50, which is among a high earning wage in child care. She says that she pays \$900 for rent, and by the time she buys her groceries and pays her utilities, she has just enough for the raising costs of gas to get to work. The supplemental pay allows her to not feel the stress of paying her bills as well as sometimes able to put money into her savings account.

For Parkside: she is a valuable team member for our program. The kids in her class and their families love her. She loves her job; she is the person who just by talking can tell how much she loves her job with her passion. I worry when she says to me, "My family told me that _____ is hiring." I know I am not able to

compete with other businesses in our community without putting our whole business at risk.

Currently, payroll to keep our wages competitive to other professional occupations in our area is 78% of our budget. I am barely able to put any money aside in our savings account after paying for our rent, (which is \$11,000), utilities and all that is needed to provide a high-quality environment for our children and staff. Our program is running month to month and if there was an emergency, we would need to either take a loan out or use our credit line. We need your help. In order to keep the staff who are so wonderful to the children in our program we need you to recognize the support that is needed for child care in Maine. When the announcement for the \$200 supplement checks was made it was in order to try to keep our current employees or encourage others to look at joining our team. This money was (in my eyes) a recognition from our state that our profession is important, in fact essential. For the first time since the pandemic, I have not lost an employee in the past 4 months. 4 months! That is how unstable our employment is in this field! It costs our business more than the \$200 for advertising, interviewing and orientating when hiring an individual. Please help us continue to provide the support our staff needs. In order for my business to stay competitive in the labor market and offer the care families need to get to their jobs, increased investments in the salary supplements will help keep my classrooms staffed and parents at work. It will also help keep tuition increases to families down as we try to support our employees in the labor market.

Later this session there will be a bill to propose increases to the salary supplement program and I ask you to support these measures to help save child care in the state of Maine.