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Testimony of Meredith Gutheinz before  
the Committee On Appropriations and Financial Affairs and  
the Committee on Health and Human Services  
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

February 21, 2023

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, members of the Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs, and Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, members of the Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Meredith Gutheinz and I'm the Senior Director of Childcare for the Penobscot Bay YMCA. I support the investments in the child care industry in the Governor's budget proposal.

Collectively, the 15 YMCAs in Maine are the largest childcare provider in the state. We serve thousands of children in our early childhood education programs, before/after school programs, and summer camp. These programs provide children with safe, nurturing and enriching care, and are a critical component of our state's infrastructure to support working parents and our economy.

There are a couple components of this bill in particular that I want to highlight as impactful for the YMCA. We greatly appreciate the Governor's inclusion of these initiatives.

- 1) 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. (Page 307)

*The \$200 salary supplements have provided us a way to pay our staff a salary they deserve. It makes staff feel valued as a teacher and has helped to retain staff during a time when they could have left child care to make more at a big box store. It is a huge challenge to find qualified caring staff and the \$200 stipend is an added benefit that helps to attract potential staff to our center. Most importantly it helps us to retain staff so the children and families can receive consistent quality care from the teachers they love.*

- 2) Funding to annualize funds received in Public Law 2021, chapter 679, An Act to Expand the Statewide Voluntary Early Childhood Consultation Program, for the Early Childhood Consultation Program. (Page 333)

*Our program is very excited and eagerly awaiting the availability of ECCP. It could not come at more important time as we are dealing with more behaviors in children from the unknown effects of the pandemic. What we do know is that children and families are experiencing a level*

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*of PTSD and child care staff are not trained in how to help children through this difficult time. The ECCP program is willing to help teachers, centers, families and children at a time when it is critical for the success of children to thrive and teachers to find tools and resources to help as they have never seen this level of trauma in the children they care for. We have yet to utilize this program as it is not yet available in our county but we are ready to apply as soon as it becomes available. The ECCP is a thoughtfully created vital program for the success of early childhood education in Maine*

Ensuring that all young children have an equal opportunity for healthy growth and development is a long-term investment in Maine's future prosperity. 90% of a child's brain develops as early as five years old, and positive early learning experiences establish strong foundations for the brain's architecture. We appreciate the initiatives outlined in the Governor's budget, and look forward to working with you and your colleagues this session to further increase the state investment in this critical sector.

Respectfully submitted,

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