



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT®  
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FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Testimony of Tina Jennings 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 Tina Jennings and I'm the Community & Youth Engagement Director for the YMCA of Auburn-Lewiston. 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 a month wage stipend has helped staff in our field tremendously. Childcare is not a money making field, people work in this field for the love of educating tomorrow's leaders and it is one of the lowest paying fields to be in. The extra \$200 has allowed many people to stay in the job, even with the rising costs of food, housing and basic essentials.

Non-profits like the YMCA cannot afford to compete with businesses who are offering high wages for jobs that require little skill. Childcare is not a money maker, but providing quality care and educating children is one of the most important, and challenging jobs you could have. We have seen GOOD early childhood educators leave the field to work in jobs that are much less demanding and pay much more. This also leaves our loyal staff prone to burnout. I have been in

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this field for 19 years and I have never seen it as bad as this. Without quality providers, or providers at all, families will not be able to work.

We have, and continue to struggle with hiring staff, any staff, never mind quality early childhood educators. This work is challenging, and we continue to be short staffed, see high rates of turnover and have had to hold off on opening new classrooms/sites because we simply cannot staff them.

Raising children is difficult, the role of a childcare provider is to give families a safe caregiver when they need to work, but it is also to give children opportunities to learn and thrive throughout their day, to ensure that they are on track to hit their developmental milestones, observe for delays, provide resources to families, be mentors, the list could go on forever!

- 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)

We have seen a HUGE increase in social emotional behaviors in children and childcare providers need help to support these children, keep them in care and help them thrive. It is as plain as that.

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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