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Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Health and Human Services Committees, my name is Heather Stephenson and I am Lead Educator of young children. I live in Richmond. I am asking you to reject the following child care initiatives in the Supplemental budget:

Reducing funding by recognizing one-time General Fund savings for monthly wage supplements for all child care workers due to the October 25, 2023 effective date of Public Law 2023, chapter 412.

\* It is imperative that funding allocated to the child care wage supplement program be carried through to ensure full implementation for the remainder of the fiscal year as early childhood educators continue to improve their on their professional development and achieve higher paying tiers. If this funding is reduced, there is a risk of having to lower the wage tiers hurting child care educator's paychecks.

Reducing funding on a one-time basis due to the delayed implementation of changes to income eligibility for child care subsidies in the Child Care Affordability Program enacted in Public Law 2023, chapter 412, Part VVV.

\* Families were promised this expansion would begin on January 1st, 2024 through the law passed by this legislature and again in a press release issued by the Governor. To backtrack on the progress of this initiative is ignoring the continued challenges families face in affording and accessing child care and is mute to the ongoing child care crisis in in your communities.

Reducing funding by recognizing one-time savings for child care staff in the Maine Child Care Affordability Program due to delaying implementation until fiscal year 2024-25.

\* Child care programs and educators have been anticipating the start of this program as intended in law and NOT a time limited, piloted program. This is a promising step forward in recruiting and retaining the child care workforce. Every day we delay this program, more child care educators leave the field. The Legislature did the hard work to ensure this recruitment and retention strategy to build back the child care educator workforce and the proposal to delay in the budget sends a message that educators needs go unheard.

If Maine is to make good on a promise the Legislature made to address the child care crisis, then please reject these initiatives and send the message that we will move forward as a state and attend to the needs of young children, their families, and this incredible workforce behind the workforce.