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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 Lindsay Schoff and I am an educator in the Early Childhood Program at Bowdoin College, in Brunswick, Maine. As a recent Maine resident, I was so impressed to learn about the childcare worker subsidy program Maine had established shortly before my move to the state. My former state, Wisconsin, had just voted the opposite way to do away with their subsidy program, and I saw the impact that was having on teachers around the state. As I was deciding on a career path in Maine, a big push to stay in the early childhood field was because of the additional stipends Maine was providing. Delaying these stipends will directly impact my financial situation and my ability to keep living comfortably in Maine.

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 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.

Thank you.