

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 Bridget Barden, and I am both an Early Childhood Educator, and a Mom. I live in Hollis.

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.

This is important to me on so many levels. As a parent, my family would largely benefit from receiving Child Care Affordability funds to alleviate the stress of paying for child care for our son. It is beyond frustrating to work in such an important field in a high quality program, only to struggle to be able to send my son. While I appreciate that the owner of my program gives me somewhat of a discount on our tuition, I know that she is taking a large financial loss overall by doing so. If she couldn't accommodate this, I would end up having to leave this field. If I left the

program I work at, it is unclear if they could remain open due to the challenge to hire, train, and retain employees in the field as a whole. This piggybacks directly on why it is so important to me that our wage supplements stay as they are, and continue to do so. The wage supplements ensure that I am able to pay bills on time, without having to sacrifice paying for things like gas, groceries, and other household expenses. I work hard in this field, both for the children and families in my program, and to make things better for my counterparts across the state. I serve on a large, nationwide Commission for Professional Excellence in Early Childhood Education to help support Early Educators across the nation. While I step up for others and support them, I think it only fair that others here should step up for this field, and in this case, that is you on this committee.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Please feel free to reach out to me with any questions about the work that I do in the field of Early Childhood Education.

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