

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 Melanie Tompkins and I am a mother as well as a Licensed Clinical Social Worker who lives in Mapleton and serves all of Aroostook County.

I am asking you to reject the following child care initiatives in the Supplemental Budget:

Delaying the income eligibility increase for families, delaying the staff inclusion in the Affordability Program and reducing the funding of the wage supplements for child care workers.

Our families, communities and businesses have struggled long enough with this childcare crisis. Senator Jackson's bill promised to address this crisis head on by improving access for families and investing in our children. It is imperative that the state hold up its end of the deal by funding in full these desperately needed initiatives. It is time to align our budget with our values and take care of our working families. Without these changes to the childcare system, we risk losing more providers, limiting our already taxed workforce and crippling our entire economy.

Personally, if I or my husband had to leave our place of employment due to lack of childcare, we would be losing around \$600 per week. Aroostook County would lose 1 of the only 3 HCT providers; and my husband's employer would see a drastic reduction in productivity. I personally work hand-in-hand with high-risk families to try to maintain children in their homes and am the highest intensity service before we have to send our youth far distances for residential treatment. Pulling a mental health clinician from the field at this time would have a substantial impact on our community.

This funding should be helping to stabilize the childcare workforce by increasing wages for childcare workers and allowing them access to the support they need to remain in the field, therefore leading to more stable schedules and more availability for working families; it would allow for these underpaid, highly-valuable professionals to receive fair compensation. As someone who works in an underpaid profession, I feel passionate that our childcare providers deserve this long overdue raise. Fully funding these initiatives is a smart economic investment that will allow increased workforce participation now while simultaneously setting Maine up for a successful future as research has shown that investing in youth reduces welfare costs, increases tax revenue and reduces crime and incarceration.

Please reject these changes.

Thank you for your consideration.

Melanie Tompkins, LCSW

Mapleton, Maine