

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer and members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Health and Human Services Committees, my name is Melanie Tompkins, and I am the Director of the Aroostook County Childcare Resource Center.

I am speaking here today to urge you to **support** funding the childcare initiatives that were put into place last session as they are vital to the survival of our childcare industry.

Our providers rely on the Educators Wage Supplement and Childcare Employment Award to help them earn a livable wage and remain in the industry. And our families rely on the Child Care Affordability Program to allow them to work outside the home. Any reduction or loss of these programs could be devastating to an already fragile system, especially in Aroostook County.

You know the cost of living is overwhelming for so many people, but removing these supports for our working families could cause major ripple effects in every part of our economy.

All businesses are impacted by the health of our childcare industry as they depend on their employees' ability to get to work, and employees are only able to do this when the system is functioning properly.

In my role as Director of the Childcare Resource Center, I frequently encounter the benefits of these programs. Our work over the last year with our local providers has relied on the accessibility of these programs, helping to maintain appropriate staffing for ratio and ensuring the health and safety of the children. Providing these basic benefits to childcare providers addresses some of the significant challenges this workforce faces, including low wages and high turnover rates.

Childcare is not a profit-making business, providers do it because they love it. But if they cannot pay their own bills, how long will they continue providing this valuable care?

Providers and parents continue to be resourceful and resilient, but this **constant** battle is wearing on them all. Some providers have given up the fight, and many parents have stopped trying, deciding instead to just quit their job and stay home.

I know this is how it used to be, with stay-at-home moms and single income families, but folks CANNOT survive like that anymore.

Our economy requires two incomes to afford basic needs. And if both parents are working, who is caring for the children?

It is my hope, (*and my job*), to ensure that the answer is a quality, safe and accessible childcare provider.

But if society, the state of Maine, or the federal government doesn't fix this mess, there may be no one left to provide that care.

And I don't have time to explain what all those consequences could be.

So please, invest in this fragile, necessary system. Help ensure the stability and long-term health of our childcare and early education system.

Please support our children, our future; fully fund the childcare initiatives.

Thank you for your time.