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I am Danielle Gorman, a resident of Westbrook and I work in Portland.

I am the division director for the early childhood program for Breakwater Learning. We are an independent school with an early childhood program of 48 students and a school age after school program, serving an additional 120 students from our day school and surrounding public schools.

I am here to strongly advocate for maintaining the investments in state stipends for employees of licensed early childhood and out of school professional programs.

I have been at Breakwater for 12 years. This year, we have the most skilled, committed, and robust team of professionals working in our program that I have ever seen. And the stipend has been an important contributor to that reality.

I used those words skilled, committed, and robust intentionally.

My team is skilled: Out of my 9 lead teachers: 3 have masters degrees in education, 5 have bachelors degrees, and 3 are additionally certified to teach special education and elementary.

They are committed: the only person that didn't return, including my assistant team, only left because their family moved out of state.

My team is robust: I have an incredible team of assistant/aftercare teachers including K-8 classroom teachers with ECE backgrounds, and retired teachers. This is the second year that we are fully staffed, including substitute teachers.

For the past 6-8 years, even before COVID, this was not the case. We regularly did not have enough assistants to support our day program, and in 2021, our aftercare staff became so unreliable, we closed our early childhood aftercare program.

Year after year, lead teachers would regularly move on to elementary grade levels or they would leave the early care and education field entirely for other careers. My recruitment goals consistently had to seek out and prioritize teachers who wanted to stay in early childhood, rather than use it as a stepping stone into our organization.

This stipend has been instrumental in recruiting and keeping skilled teachers. The money is obvious. It is not a secret that early care and education professionals are grossly underpaid. This stipend begins to close that gap.

The stipend also communicates a level of respectability and value of this work by society. This makes a big difference. How we compensate a professional reflects the value society places on work. Currently, Maine is national leader in demonstrating the value of this field.

Professionals stay in a field where they are respected - regarded as skilled professionals - that their work has meaning, makes a difference. This stipend says - as a society - this work matters - it pays dividends in the quality of our society - and our state knows this.

I have a robust team that is coming back year after year, staying in ECE - because they are better able to support themselves, it makes their personal investment in their education worth it and sustainable.

In addition, I have been able to recruit experienced, retired teachers and school age teachers to come and support our program part time because their compensation makes it worth their time. Our school age aftercare program is seeing the same benefit.

As a result, after slowly re-opening our ECE aftercare program for a few families at a time, this is the first year I have been able to re-open our early childhood aftercare program for our entire community.

If you cut the stipend, I know I will lose members of my early childhood aftercare team. I have lead teachers who love the early childhood field that will again struggle

to make ends meet and may have to change fields for their own financial stability.

Maine will lose all the ground that has been gained by this program.

Investments in early childhood have strong universal returns on investment. There is no question that Maine gets back every single dollar it puts into early childhood. It helps every family and every citizen to have a strong early childhood field.

And it does pay dividends!

"Nobel Prize-winning economist James Heckman found that every \$1 invested in quality early childhood programs generates \$4 to \$16 in returns. The earlier we act, the greater the impact—for kids, families, businesses and communities."

<https://www.firstthingsfirst.org/early-childhood-matters/investing-in-early-childhood/#:~:text=Nobel%20Prize%2Dwinning%20economist%20James,%2C%20families%2C%20businesses%20and%20communities.>

Thank you for investing in all of us by maintaining the funding of the state stipend program.

Sincerely,  
Danielle Gorman