

Elek Pew
Gray
LD 210

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and honorable committee members, my name is Elek Pew, I live in Gray, and I am submitting testimony today in support of Maine's early childhood education system.

My wife and I are expecting our first child in mid-May. We both work full time, own our home, and have living parents who are very excited to meet their first grandchild. We are grateful to have a support system that will likely drop everything if we ever need childcare.

We have already signed our child up for daycare for when we return to work after our parental leave. We found this location based on a recommendation from a friend, and we are extremely fortunate that they had open space to offer us this September. We are lucky to have the income to be able to afford full time childcare once we're back at work, but it was still a challenge to find the right place for our child to go. It will also be a drain on our resources, as it is for many families, costing well over \$20,000 a year for 5 days a week of childcare. That said, I am eternally grateful we will be able to make it work.

This is not the case for so many families. Having strong child care infrastructure will only help strengthen our community. When parents can rely on local agencies and workers, our economy will become stronger. More parents will be able to return to work. When childcare workers are paid a strong wage, we will stop hearing stories about a lack of a willing workforce. These employees are caring for and helping to raise future doctors, teachers, engineers, and various other professions. We need to compensate them in a way that shows we value their work. I know that I want the best for my child, and that is why I support investing more in our child care system in Maine, not cutting services.

The current budget proposes cuts to the Child Care Wage Supplement Program, Head Start, and the Child Care Employment Award - all programs that make it possible for the state to offer more child care options. I am confused that these cuts are proposed instead of finding ways to invest in them more. I strongly urge the committee to look deeply at these proposed cuts and think about the long lasting impact they could have on our state, the workforce, and our future. Please invest in these programs instead of cutting them.

Thank you.