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LD 210

On Behalf of the Family Child Care Association of Maine to the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee

Regarding the Budget Hearing on Child Care Funding Cuts

Chairperson, Members of the Committee, my name is Jennifer Wescott, and I am providing this testimony as the President of the Family Child Care Association of Maine (FCCAM). FCCAM's mission is to strengthen quality professional family child care in Maine. Our members work with infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and Kindergarten through 3rd grade students in family child care programs. Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

I am writing to urge you to reconsider the proposed cuts to child care funding, specifically the elimination of the salary supplement program and the Child Care Affordability Program (CCAP) Child Care Employment Award.

The salary supplement program has been instrumental in creating financial stability for child care professionals across Maine. By providing a monthly stipend based on an individual's MRTQ Career Lattice level, this program has helped bridge the wage gap between child care workers and other industries such as fast food and retail. This support has made child care employment sustainable and allowed providers to remain in the field they are passionate about. We still are at a lower wage than other employers, even with the supplements. If this funding is eliminated, we risk losing dedicated professionals to other jobs that offer higher pay, putting many child care programs at risk of closure due to staffing shortages. Another result might be reducing the number of kids programs can enroll, causing more hardships to families searching for care.

Equally concerning is the proposed elimination of the CCAP Child Care Employment Award. It is important to note that family child care providers are not eligible for the traditional CCAP program. This award serves as their only financial support. Without it, many family child care providers—who play a crucial role in Maine's early education system—may no longer be able to sustain their businesses. Family child care providers offer flexible, high-quality care that meets the diverse needs of families in our state, including those in rural areas where child care options are already scarce.

Eliminating these programs would have devastating consequences, not only for child care professionals but also for the families who rely on them. Without adequate staffing and financial support, child care programs will be forced to close, leaving working families without the reliable care they need to remain in the workforce. Maine's economy depends on accessible, quality child care, and cutting these vital supports would only exacerbate the existing child care crisis.

I urge you to prioritize child care funding and protect these essential programs. Investing in child care means investing in Maine's workforce, businesses, and future generations.

Thank you for your time and consideration.