



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT®
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Testimony of Brianna Harper before
the Committee On Appropriations and Financial Affairs and
the Committee on Health and Human Services
in opposition to
LD 210, the Governor's proposed Biennial Budget

February 13, 2025

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, Senator Ingwersen, and Representative Meyer and distinguished members of the Committees On Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Health and Human Services, my name is Brianna and I'm a lead pre-k teacher at the Bath Area Family. I am very concerned about the budget cuts to two critical initiatives that help stabilize the childcare sector by investing in our educators:

- Elimination of the Childcare Employment Award program (current investment of \$2.5 million per year) that helps childcare educators pay for their own childcare
- Cutting in half the Childcare Worker Stipends from \$30 million a year to \$15 million per year.

As both of these programs are currently utilizing all their available funding, these cuts would have a significant negative impact on our field. Our workforce is critical to provide safe, reliable, quality care for Maine children so their parents can work.

The salary stipend has made a significant difference in my life, allowing me to feel seen and valued as a human being. With this financial support, I am able to afford groceries, pay my bills on time, and eliminate the constant worry of whether payments will be late or if I will fall further into debt. The stipend has also provided me with the opportunity to reduce the hours at my second job, allowing me to achieve a better work-life balance. Without this compensation, I would likely be forced to work 40 hours at my primary job, alongside another 20 hours at my second job, which would quickly lead to burnout. This stipend has allowed me to meet my basic needs without compromising my well-being, and for that, I am deeply grateful.

Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) consistently face a lack of respect and inadequate compensation, especially when compared to the profound impact we have on children's development and the families we serve. Despite the critical importance of our work, the field continues to be undervalued, with wages that fail to reflect the responsibilities and dedication required. Many talented individuals in ECE are often compelled to seek alternative employment, such as retail or clerical positions, which, while less stressful, often pay more and provide better benefits. These positions may even be ones they are overqualified for.

ECE is far from a typical 9-to-5 job. It extends beyond the classroom, with educators constantly thinking about lesson plans, student progress, and the well-being of the families we support. We spend countless hours outside of our regular workday completing mandatory training, preparing for conferences, and refining our practices. The low wages we receive fail to reflect the multiple roles we play—caretaker, teacher, counselor, and organizer. Without adequate compensation, it is difficult to retain passionate professionals in the field. Unless one is truly dedicated to early childhood education, it is likely they will eventually seek a job that values their time and provides the financial stability they deserve.

Our work is essential, and it is time that our efforts are met with the respect and compensation that match the importance of shaping the next generation.

A strong foundation in early childhood education creates children who are not only able to emotionally regulate and function but also thrive in an environment where their imagination can flourish. It is a place where the most imaginative, sometimes absurd ideas come to life, where children and their families build meaningful, lasting connections—becoming like an extended family. It is a space where diversity is celebrated, where every child is free to be themselves without fear of judgment. Above all, it is a place where children can simply be children, exploring, learning, and growing at their own pace.

I am committed to this field because every child deserves a champion—someone who ensures they feel safe, loved, and supported in their education. It is my mission to provide every child with the opportunity to receive the education they have every right to access, in an environment where they are encouraged, valued, and nurtured. This is the heart of early childhood education, and it is why I am dedicated to making a positive impact in the lives of every child I serve.

I urge you to oppose these harmful budget cuts.

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