



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT®
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Testimony of Casey Clark Kelley 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 24, 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 Casey Clark Kelley and I'm the Chief Executive Officer of the Central Lincoln County YMCA where we serve over 50 children in early education care. 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 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 childcare system continues to be under incredible strain. The Ys have extensive waitlists of families trying to access care for their children. This leaves parents to make incredibly hard decisions around placing their children in unlicensed care, cutting back their work hours, or leaving the workforce altogether. Despite our best efforts, the system is failing.

The childcare system needs public investment to meet the needs of Maine families and childcare workers.

These stipends provide crucial financial support for our staff, many of whom are deeply dedicated to this work but struggle to get by on traditionally low wages. Without this assistance, we risk losing skilled educators to higher-paying fields, further weakening an already vulnerable workforce. Early childhood education is demanding—our teachers do far more than provide care; they serve as educators, mentors, and key figures in child development. Yet, their compensation fails to reflect the significance of their role. Recruiting and retaining qualified staff remains a constant challenge, as many potential hires leave for jobs offering better salaries and benefits. If these stipends are reduced, more educators will be forced to leave the profession, leading to higher turnover, staffing shortages, and ultimately, fewer childcare options for families in our community.

I urge you to oppose these harmful budget cuts.

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