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Testimony of Chanel Hartley 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 Chanel Hartley and I'm the Assistant Site Director and Lead Preschool Teacher at the YMCA of Auburn-Lewiston. 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.

I do this work because I love to help children thrive, learn and grow. When they move on, I still get to see them grow and their parents tell me how much I helped them in school and at Pre-K when they were at the YMCA.

We cannot lose the Childcare Worker Salary Stipend. It helps keep staff and if we have it reduced even more, we can lose a lot of great teachers because the stipend helps a lot of staff to pay bills and allows them to stay employed in the field. It has helped me pay my bills and save money for my kids to live a better life. Many staff were very unhappy to find out that they were losing money and are already looking for jobs that pay better that would equal to what they were earning with the stipend every month.

If we lose staff, we lose classrooms and then we would have a longer waitlist because we would not have enough teachers to cover all the classrooms.

I urge you to oppose these harmful budget cuts.

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