



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT®
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Testimony of Courtney Wood 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 Courtney Wood and I'm Director of Child Care Services at the Down East Family YMCA. 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.

In the childcare sector, pay has always been a struggle. We have always been on the lower end of the pay scale in our communities and we have one of the Top 10 most stressful jobs in the country. When the stipend was enacted, it made a huge difference in not only recruiting, which is still difficult, but also in retaining quality staff at closer to what their worth is. If you choose to cut the stipend in half, then most of my staff will need to either find a supplemental job, which will cause further burnout, or they will find new jobs altogether. The more turnover we see, which happens due to burnout and lack of pay, the poorer our program quality becomes. We need to keep quality childcare programs in our community. Early Education is an important part of the larger education system. It is where children start to learn their social skills and the foundational elements of their education, including numbers, colors, and shapes. In order to maintain quality early education, we need to maintain quality staff. Staff with college degrees find it hard to make a living in this field. If the stipends and the Employment Award are cut, how are we supposed to find quality candidates? Why is it that now, when people are finally starting to go back to work and when society finally sees the benefit of early education, are we cutting these two critical programs?

I urge you to oppose these harmful budget cuts. I urge you to think of other solutions, and even increase the budget for the Childcare Worker Stipends and Childcare Employment Award program.

Respectfully submitted,

Courtney Wood
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