



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT®
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Testimony of Jamie Westling 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 Jamie Westling and I'm the site director at Temple Garden Preschool as well as the Older Infants Primary 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.

- *The salary stipends help to supplement the low salaries staff receive for working in childcare. People can't afford to pay higher childcare costs, so salaries stay low, and the stipend has made it possible for some to continue doing the work that they love.*
- *The childcare employment award is critical in making childcare affordable for our employees. Most of our staff have children of their own.*
- *It is very difficult to attract and retain quality staff when they are only being offered minimum wage or slightly above. This is a very demanding field, and most employees see easier jobs paying more.*
- *Staff turnover and vacancies are very harmful to programs. These families are paying for quality childcare but that's not easy to provide when we don't have adequate staff. It takes time to build bonds with the children and when staff aren't able to remain in the field due to inadequate pay, the children lose the people they have built these bonds with.*
- *Early education is the most important work. From birth to age 8, a child's brain develops, providing the foundation for all future learning, behavior, and health. We are shaping these tiny humans into who they will become when they reach adulthood. It is imperative to have quality staff providing this care. It's also important for families to know that their children are being well cared for and the only way to make sure that happens is to offer pay that matches the quality of care we need to provide.*

I urge you to oppose these harmful budget cuts.

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