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FOR HEALTHY LIVING  
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Testimony of Tina Jennings 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 Tina Jennings and I'm the Association Director of Community & Youth Engagement 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 would like to start by addressing the proposed cuts to the Childcare Worker Salary Stipend. These funds have been critical in attracting and keeping workers in the childcare field. If these funds are reduced, I anticipate losing staff to higher paying jobs that do not require the level of care, service and dedication that working with children requires. We simply cannot afford to lose the staff that we do have, and without these funds, we will lose some of the hiring leverage that we have gained.

Staff who have been receiving the Childcare Employment Award have had a HUGE weight taken off their shoulders. Even though we do give a staff discount off the cost of childcare, we are not able to give as much as we would like. This is also a huge benefit to retain staff!

The demands of this field are becoming harder every year. Staff are trying to keep up with the high expectations of Childcare Licensing requirements, Rising Stars Program and Maine Roads to Quality. Children are experiencing more behavior challenges, and the burnout rate is high. We are asking a lot of the staff, and the pay does not match expectations. Staff can easily find employment that pays more and requires less. Their passion for their work keeps them in the field until they simply cannot afford it anymore.

Staff turnover and vacancies have a significant effect on programming, staff morale and relationships. Families and children build trust with the staff and when there is a disruption in care it has a profound impact. If ratio cannot be met we face the threat of licensing violations, closing classrooms and bumping children into other spaces with less familiar caregivers. If we are not properly staffed, the staff that we do have bear the weight and that can lead to burnout and frustration.

I urge you to oppose these harmful budget cuts.

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