

Sara Perrigo  
Scarborough  
LD 210

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee and Health and Human Services Committee, my name is Sara Perrigo. I am a co-director and live in Scarborough.

I am opposed to the proposed \$15 million annual/\$30 million biennial cuts to the Child Care Wage Supplement Program. We have been in business since 1988 and are nationally accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and hold a 5-star ranking in Maine's Quality and Improvement System, Rising Stars for ME. We are licensed to care for 128 children ages birth through 5 years old. I'd like to specifically address the proposal to cut \$15 million annually from the Child Care Wage Supplement Program that would significantly reduce the amount that child care educators receive each month to support their wages. We provide our children and families with high-quality care and provide our staff with highly competitive wages and benefits for the early childhood field. Despite this, we continue to struggle hiring new staff since the Covid-19 pandemic. In fact, hiring now is even worse now than it was 3 years ago. The result of this is that we are unable to fill 30 of our child care spots due to not being able to hire new teachers. The Child Care Wage Supplement Program has helped us to maintain the amazing staff we currently have at least, even though new hires are still very hard to find. If this program were to go back to the 2022 wage supplement rates, we would most likely lose some teachers as we would be unable to pay out the difference in addition to regular raises. Going back to the supplement being \$200 across the board means the greatest loss will be felt by the teachers with the most experience and the highest education. Therefore, not just making it more difficult to hire in general, but even more difficult to retain high-quality educators. If we lose teachers, we will be forced to close more classrooms, and that is unsustainable for our business. That means more of Maine's workforce will be left without child care. We are exhausted from continually having to defend the value and importance of our work and have been doing everything in our power to continue to provide high-quality child care to Maine's working families even through a pandemic. It is shocking that after finally being deemed "essential" and "the workforce behind the workforce," and all working so diligently to stay in business, the state would turn around 2 years later and drop the wage supplement. If you decide to follow through with this proposal, you will directly reduce the quality of service in the child care industry and will certainly lose more child care workers and are likely to force more child care centers and homes to close. We cannot afford to go backwards. Maine's children and families are counting on you to support the child care industry that allows them to continue to have access to quality care and maintain their own jobs. Maine's future is also counting on you. Some of the critical skills learned in early childhood education are communication, problem-solving, working together, understanding how your actions impact others, listening to others, speaking up for yourself, independence, patience, empathy, persevering, self-confidence, and healthy self-esteem, to name a few. Imagine if all the adults you work with possessed these skills. Imagine if they had learned and internalized them at a young age; how different our state, our country, and our world would be. Maine's early childhood educators are doing important, critical work; please continue to show that you understand and value this by not making cuts to the wage supplement program. Thank you for your consideration.