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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 Ashley Jones. I am a mentor teacher and live in Norridgewock.

I am opposed to the proposed \$15 million annual/\$30 million biennial cuts to the Child Care Wage Supplement Program. The Child Care Wage Supplement Program has provided me with financial security against the rising cost of living. Without this supplemental income, I fear that basic needs like purchasing groceries, and heating my home will become difficult. For the first time in my adult life I have been able to establish a savings account for myself because of the Child Care Wage Supplement Program. This has provided me with financial security that I did not have before. Having this cut would be a huge loss to my household.

I am opposed to the proposed \$3.6 million annual/\$7.2 million biennial cuts to general funds for Head Start. These are our most VULNERABLE families. Head Start was created to provide high-quality care and education to children who are most at risk. It helps to close the opportunity gap by providing resources and support to children and families in our communities, while also supporting the emotional, social, health, nutritional, and psychological needs of children. Cutting from the Head Start budget will greatly impact families in Maine by limiting their access to these resources immensely, while also creating a climate of downfall in the quality of care that Head Start and Early Head Start programs are able to provide through proper funding.

I am opposed to the proposed \$2.5 million annually/\$5 million biennial cuts and elimination of the Child Care Employment Award. If we want high quality educators to stay in the field, we need to offer them the resources to have their own children in quality childcare centers in order to be comfortable returning to, and staying in the field and this means having some of the financial burden taken off their shoulders. I watched many of my close friends and coworkers battle with the challenge of returning to work after maternity leave and having to pay the outrageously high childcare rates, or choose to stay home because the financial impact would have been too grand. The Child Care Employment Award should have given families of child care employees peace of mind about choosing childcare for their infants, toddlers, and preschoolers, but it requires effort and time! Of course there was a lengthy list of applicants, because we have a lengthy list of child care educators who want the absolute best for their children!