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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 Melissa Holt. I am an owner/director and live in Exeter.

I am opposed to the proposed \$15 million annual/\$30 million biennial cuts to the Child Care Wage Supplement Program. Reducing the Child Care Wage Supplement Program would be detrimental not only to those receiving it but also to the small businesses employing them. The lowest tier stipend adds a little over a dollar per hour for staff who work 40 hours per week. This is significant and makes a difference for staff. This allows them to work in a field that they are passionate about while also being able to put food on the table for their families. Without the stipend staff make anywhere from 14.40-17.00 dollars per hour, this is not enough. Providers and families are benefiting from the stipend, as tuition is the only source of revenue. Reducing the stipend will instantly mean that tuition rates need to increase, which will be a direct hit to families. Providers will be forced to increase rates to provide a wage increase for all staff to make up for the loss of supplemental money. Which means that families will be forced to choose between paying for childcare or going to work. If families choose to have a parent stay home, the state will feel the hit. Eliminating or reducing funding for childcare will not just affect Childcare, it will affect the State and the economy.

I am opposed to the proposed \$3.6 million annual/\$7.2 million biennial cuts to general funds for Head Start. Funding for Head Start programs can not be cut because children matter. The future of this state matters. Head Start allows children from the lowest income families to have quality care and home cooked meals. It allows them to gain a foundation of skills they otherwise would not receive. They should not be excluded because their families are struggling. ALL children matter, our future matters.

I am opposed to the proposed \$2.5 million annually/\$5 million biennial cuts and elimination of the Child Care Employment Award. This program is essential, as many childcare educators are putting 50-80% of what they make weekly back into childcare through tuition for their child. It is clear how important this program is, it speaks for itself. The program began in July of 2024 and by November there was a waitlist. In three months the funding was claimed, this is huge, why would we even consider cutting the funding when there is a waitlist. If there is a waitlist, there is a need. Childcare matters, those who own, who work, who attend, they all matter. This profession is just that, it is a profession. A profession that is known as the workforce behind the workforce. The only thing missing is an excellent benefit package. This program is a huge benefit and these workers deserve it.