

Good Afternoon 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 Kaitie Gilmour. I live in Houlton, Maine with my husband and our children. I am also the owner and director of Laugh & Learn Academy, a Maine state license child care facility that provides childcare services for around 80 families in our community.

As many of you know, in the recent past the State of Maine has created the Wage Supplement Program to help encourage people to work in the childcare field and to help combat the staffing crisis that has been so prevalent in child care facilities. Maine also expanded the Child Care Affordability Program that subsidizes child care payments for low income families and introduced the Employee Award, allowing people working in childcare to access childcare for their own children.

Maine child care facilities and families responded overwhelmingly to these programs, resulting in substantial waitlists for both the Child Care Affordability Program and the Employee Award as well as requiring the Wage Supplement Program to adjust the dollar amounts awarded to child care providers to make up for the increase in child care staff. One could conclude that these programs have proven themselves to be necessary in supporting working Maine families and need to be supported with more funds to combat the waitlists that have been created, and yet the proposed budget does not reflect the needed additional funds needed for the CCAP and Employee Award programs and cuts funding to the Wage Supplement program significantly.

My program is already seeing negative effects from the Child Care Affordability Program waitlist. We have families that reach out to us who would utilize child care and be able to work if they had access to the CCAP as well as several staff who qualify for the Employee Award but have been waitlisted for that program as well. Without increased funding to these programs there will be negative effects to an already distressing child care business market. Not only for me and my staff but for child care facilities around the state.

I surveyed my employees in regards to the Wage Supplement Program to get a better understanding of how it's being used and decide whether or not it was necessary for me to advocate for reconsideration of the proposed budget. I asked them: What does it mean for them to have those funds? What impact would it make to them if you do not receive the Salary Supplement funds or they are cut in half? And lastly, does the Salary Supplement influence their decision to stay employed in the childcare field? As a vast majority of the answers cited that they utilize the funds for basic necessities like heating fuel, car payments and necessities for their own children, the response was an

overwhelming yes that it would negatively affect them. What scares me the most is while no one said they would for sure leave the childcare field more than 50% of them said that they would consider other employment opportunities in the event that the Wage Supplement is significantly decreased. This would have devastating effects on our child care center and in turn the working families in our community.

I can not understand why the State of Maine did so much work to move child care programs forward, invested so much time and money into grant programs to open new childcare facilities, Wage Supplement programs to encourage people to work in those facilities and the Child Care Affordability and Employee Award programs to support families that want to work but need some assistance affording quality child care, just to underfund the programs that are needed most, which in turn recreates the very problems these programs were designed to solve.

I am asking you today to stand with Maine's children and child care workers by rejecting these cuts and advocating for the additional funding necessary to support Maine's future.