

Debby Adkins
PORTLAND
LD 210

Testimony of Debby Adkins
before the Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs in support of keeping
funding in place for Early Childhood Programs and Families.

LD 210 An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations from the General
Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing
Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State
Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2025, June 30, 2026 and June 30,
2027

February 24, 2025

Senator James Hampner, Representative Margaret Rotundo and distinguished
members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Debby Adkins. I am a
parent, a grandparent, and I am a retired early childhood educator. For more than 30
years I was an early childhood teacher, and during some of that time, I was a mentor
to other teachers, a resource teacher, and an administrator.

Maine was at a crossroads during and just after the pandemic. Early childhood
programs of all types were closing. Most of it had to do with staffing. They just
couldn't pay enough to retain quality educators and support staff. Unfortunately, most
programs had to rely almost completely on parent tuition to cover all costs. I am
trying to imagine what it would be like for our K-12 schools to have to rely on parent
tuition. Educating/caring for birth to 4 is the only segment of our population that isn't
fully subsidized by taxes and federal support. Yet it is the time of the most
development in every way. This model ends up with the lowest paid teachers, way
less than our public school Prek and kindergarten teachers, so low that many can't
stay in early childhood education. They can actually make more money working at a
Target, even with degrees in ECE. The impact of ECE programs closing on Maine's
workforce led to businesses, hospitals, restaurants, etc. desperately seeking
employees.

The results of the Child Care Educator Salary Supplement Program, and the Child
Care Employment Award are incentives adding extra compensation to early care
teachers, which results in programs being able to retain excellent teachers. These
benefits are making a difference. We don't want to face Maine's early childhood
programs in the position of not having the staff they need, and once again have an
even greater shortage of child care for our families.

Personally, I loved being in the field of early childhood education. But it wasn't easy
financially. Especially after I was divorced, and raising three young children. I ended
up teaching four year olds from 7:00-3:00 M-F, then worked in a law office from
3:15-6:00, and also worked on weekends. It was exhausting, but it was the only way I
could stay in the field I loved. Sadly, it shouldn't be that way. I remember when my
youngest daughter graduated from college and got her first job teaching in a public
school PreK. She was appalled when she learned that she was making almost \$30K
more than me, a master teacher with 25+ years of experience, and she a first year
teacher.

Maine has been on a path of finding innovative ways to boost salaries for ECE
teachers. Please keep fully funding Maine's early childhood programs, especially the
Child Care Educator Salary Supplement Program, the Child Care Employment
Award, and Head Start. The proposed cuts to our early childhood programs will have
a devastating impact on Maine's educators, families and children. Maine's future
depends on our children.

Thank you for your time.