

Dear Esteemed Members of the Committees of Appropriations and Financial Affairs,

I am writing to urge you to oppose LD 210. The cuts of \$15 million to the Child Care Educator Salary Supplement, \$2.5 million for the Child Care Employment Award, and \$3.6 million to Maine's Head Start programs would have a devastating impact on our children, families, and child care workforce.

My name is Bridget, and I live in Hollis Center. I have been an Early Childhood Educator for almost 20 years. My family has come to rely on the Educator Salary Supplements, as well as the Child Care Employment Award to send my own child to school each day.

My salary supplement might not seem like a lot, but that extra money helps my husband, son, and I to remain in our home in Hollis. Life is becoming increasingly expensive, and that extra money helps us to keep our house warm in the winter. It helps us in our community as we complete our weekly grocery shopping at Plummer's just down the street in Buxton. It lets us have a bit of an emergency fund for when things pop up unexpectedly, just this week it was the car needing to be looked at. With the extra money we receive from the Salary Supplement, that's an easy fix and not a stressful panic.

The cut that could hurt us the most, would be losing the Child Care Employment Award. While my husband and I work fulltime jobs, we are riding the line of "makes too much money" to be able to access the Child Care Assistance Program. Should we lose the funding that comes via my role as an employee of a child care, we would have to pay \$800 a week for our son to continue to attend child care. This is the cost for him to attend part time, with a staff discount, to the program in which I teach.

When faced with this possibility, my husband and I have had to have really hard conversations. Do we pull our son from child care, and rely on his grandparents to help us? Is it fair to ask them to give up their 70's to help us here? Do I leave the field I love so much, because it's not sustainable to our family? If I leave, what does that mean for the college degree I hold that specializes in Early Childhood Education? What good will the master's degree I'm working toward be, if I have to leave this field?

One of the greatest gifts I have in my career is that I can spend my days alongside my son, Atticus, as I watch him grow and develop and become a whole person. I am endlessly grateful for this opportunity for us to spend our days together. And I recognize what a privilege that is. If these cuts take away the much-needed funds that my family has come to rely on, then our days together would likely end; Atticus would spend his time with his adoring grandparents, and I would be faced with finding some sort of job outside of my passion.

These cuts threaten the stability of child care providers and undermine the quality of early childhood education. Our educators, who play a crucial role in shaping the future of Maine's children, deserve support, not cuts. These reductions would only increase the challenges families face in accessing affordable, high-quality care.

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

Thank you for your attention to this critical issue.

Sincerely,

Bridget E. Barden,

Hollis Center

I can be reached with any follow up questions or clarifications via email at [bridgetbardenece@gmail.com](mailto:bridgetbardenece@gmail.com) or by phone at 207-272-6272