

Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Health and Human Services Joint Standing Committees
February 13, 2025
Douglas R. Robbins, M.D., DLFAACAP

Honorable Co-Chairs and Members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Health and Human Services Joint Standing Committees:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in opposition to reductions in support to Child Care Educator wages, the Child Care Employment Award, and to Head Start.

I am speaking on behalf of the Maine Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics and as a member of the Maine Council of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry.

I have had the honor of serving as a Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist in Maine since 1996 and teaching as Clinical Professor of Psychiatry with Tufts University School of Medicine. I currently practice in Yarmouth. My wife and I live in Pownal.

We are all aware of the budget realities facing Maine. The proposed cuts, however, will damage Maine's children, families, and economy both in the short term and for generations to come.

Child Care workers are currently paid at insufficient levels, resulting in difficulties with recruitment and retention, and limiting parents' availability for work and children's positive early development experiences. We need more, not fewer, of these professionals. The proposed \$1.5 million wage cut and the reduction of the tuition assistance program will result in fewer families of young children being served.

Reduced funding is also proposed for Head Start and Early Head Start in Maine – highly effective programs that are reversing the effects of poverty on children's development. Because of Head Start, over 1700 vulnerable children are 93% less likely to end up in foster care (1). Their physical health is improved, with less obesity (2), and 50% less mortality in the ages 5-9 (3). They are 22% more likely to graduate high school (4); 13% less likely to ever be arrested (5), and 8% less likely to become teen parents (6). These are remarkable positive effects. For more detail, please see the references and other information following this text.

Furthermore, there is robust evidence that these improvements last a lifetime and extend into the next generation. Head Start children grow up to be better parents, and their own children experience greater educational success, reduced teen pregnancy, and reduced criminal behavior. The second generation shows a 6% - 11% increase in wages throughout adulthood (6).

The intergenerational transmission of effects of Head Start show that we can break the cycle of poverty and reduce the need for such services to future generations (6, 7, 8).

The Return on Investment of these services is remarkable. \$1 spent on Head Start produces a ROI of \$7-\$9 per year, and high-quality Birth-to-Five education and support yields a ROI of 13% (7).

Investment in early childhood is one of the most powerful things we can do to break the cycle of multigenerational poverty and to continually improve Maine's economy.

We face difficult choices, but we cannot choose to invest less in our children and Maine's future. Thank you.

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References and Further Information

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8. Heckman, James J., Rodrigo Pinto, and Peter Savelyev, "Understanding the mechanisms through which an influential early childhood program boosted adult outcomes," American Economic Review, 2013, 103(6), 2052–2086.

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<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-long-term-impact-of-the-head-start-program/>

The long-term impact of the Head Start program

[Diane Whitmore Schanzenbach](#) and [Lauren Bauer](#), August 19, 2016

National Head Start Association – Resources.

<https://nhsa.org/resources/>