

Testimony of Robyn Gray and Sheena Haley, The Margaret Murphy Centers for Children

Neither For nor Against

L.D. 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 Rotundo, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Gattine, Representative Meyer, members of both the Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Health and Human Services Committees, our names are Robyn Gray and Sheena Haley. Robyn serves as Assistant Director at The Margaret Murphy Centers for Children and Sheena serves as Childcare Site Director for The Margaret Murphy Centers for Children.

The Margaret Murphy Centers for Children is a special purpose private school providing supports for children with autism and other developmental disabilities. We have been providing this service for about 25 years. While the bulk of our services are woven into the greater Lewiston Auburn area, we do stretch from Randolph through Brunswick to Saco.

About 20 years ago, after seeing a need for high quality, affordable childcare, we also opened a childcare in one of our Lewiston based centers. We created this program to provide our staff with high quality childcare so they could return to work as well as have a space for preschool students receiving services within our school to have opportunities for inclusion.

We were stunned to learn that the Governor's proposed supplemental budget includes slashing the childcare supplement for employees by 50% as well as removing the childcare employment award. As you are aware childcare is a meaningful and intensive occupation, one that provides a necessary service to families and employers. Despite this, these providers are consistently paid in the bottom 3% of all U.S occupations.

In a field where turnover is already high, it is challenging to remain competitive with pay and in turn employ highly qualified staff. Having this childcare supplement has provided our program a way to attract and retain qualified staff. By decreasing this stipend, we stand to lose our staff to other sectors. Currently the annual wage for a childcare educator in Maine is considered below a living wage for a single adult. We run the risk of losing staff to other employers in the retail or food industry. While the work may be less meaningful, the pay is greater.

We were also stunned to find out that the Childcare Employment Award would be fully eliminated. As you are aware, affordable quality childcare is difficult to find in all areas of the state. Some of the staff that are currently employed in our childcare access this benefit so they can continue to work while their child attends childcare. By cutting this award, it will be difficult for those staff to remain employed. Due to the already low wages as well as the proposed cut in

the supplement, their paycheck will primarily pay for the high cost of childcare. This may result in even more turnover in an industry that is already struggling to attract and retain staff. This will directly impact the important services that we provide to the children in our program.

Thank you for taking a moment to consider our testimony. Please feel free to reach out with any questions you may have.

Respectfully submitted,

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