

Sarah Cooper
Portland, ME
LD 210

I learned about proposed cuts to Maine's child care investments in the biennial budget and am feeling crushing hopelessness about the state of our childcare.

Please vote tomorrow to protect the

- Maine's Child Care Educator Salary Supplement Program
- Maine's Child Care Employment Award and
- Head Start

These cuts threaten the ability of our local center to stay open, because they directly support staff salaries (where living wages are essential for retention) and keep fees affordable for families. These incredible people who help care for children amidst personal financial strain deeply deserve the investment.

My personal story...

I've been on the waitlist for my local daycare center for 4 years and we have no other options if they close or reduce capacity.

If we don't get a spot for our 5 month old by August, my family has decided to leave Maine since our jobs are remote and we need daycare. We cannot afford a full time nanny and are piecemeal making it work full-time at work, with only a part-time nanny for \$3,000/month. We cannot afford to live on one salary and have one of us stay home. And 3 out of 4x grandparents have passed away. We'll be out of options.

To try and shed more light on how dismal child care has become in Maine: I hadn't even planned or conceived a family yet when I joined this waitlist. It was embarrassing and shameful to ask to be added to the list.

But I had heard from so many parents the enormous hurdles they had to jump through to get childcare, and they recommended I join the list asap. In 2022, I was pregnant and I learned we'd get a coveted spot after 2 years on the waitlist. However, I then had a miscarriage and we were put at the bottom of the list. The director was empathetic, but her hands were tied because demand is sky high.

We gratefully then had a rainbow baby boy last year, Leon, and a new spot magically became available. However, it was only available in September when an older kid graduated, so we went to the bottom of the waitlist again because he was only 3 days old at the time.

I recognize there's immense demands for funding across issues in Maine and nationally. But childcare is critical infrastructure and needs government funding. It is not something we can 'innovate' for 'efficiency' or leave to free markets.

Respectfully,

Sarah Cooper
Portland, ME

More information on impact

Maine's Child Care Educator Salary Supplement Program

The Governor's proposed \$15 million annual cut to child care educator wages would be devastating. Currently, educators earn an average of \$16.40 per hour (around \$34,000 annually), insufficient for supporting a family. Reducing the wage would lower it to \$15.15 per hour (\$31,500 annually), worsening financial strain and exacerbating workforce shortages. This program has seen an 11% increase in educators since its inception, yet cutting funding now would reverse these gains and harm the industry's progress.

Maine's Child Care Employment Award

The child care tuition assistance program, which was delayed over a year in its implementation, is crucial for recruiting and retaining staff by helping workers cover child care costs. The funds were exhausted within three months, supporting around

400 professionals, with over 450 still on the waiting list. This program is vital for maintaining a stable workforce and improving child care quality statewide. The year-long delay already deprived educators of essential savings on their child care costs, and cutting the program now would significantly disrupt the support they are receiving.

Head Start

Maine's \$3.6 million investment in Head Start serves 1,742 low-income children. Eliminating this funding would result in the loss of services for 180 children, the closure of 9 classrooms, and potential loss of millions in federal funding. This is a direct threat to the education and well-being of Maine's most vulnerable children.

So what?

Cuts to these essential programs would result in over \$4,000 in lost wages for child care educators, the removal of 400 professionals from the tuition assistance program, and the loss of critical services for 180 children. These cuts undermine the entire early care and education system and threaten Maine's long-term economic growth. Now is the time to invest in our child care workforce and ensure a stable future for Maine's children and families.