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I am writing to express urgent concern over the proposed cuts to Maine's child care investments in the biennial budget, which threaten the stability of an already fragile industry. These cuts would have significant, far-reaching consequences for child care educators, families, and the state's future prosperity. I'm asking you to stand up for your community child care programs and its predominantly woman-led workforce and small business owners and oppose these cuts.

**\*\*Personal Story:** My wife and I are both hard working, educated, and skilled Maine workers out of South Portland. I work in Bio-Tech and my wife works in Public Accounting. We have been faced with extreme challenges in 1) Lack of availability in child care 2) Lack of affordability in child care. My wife was forced to leave her job in order to care for our baby boy. Maine success = success of children. Education and child care are probably the 2 most important investments for the future of Maine.\*\*

#### 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 by half 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.

#### Conclusion

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.