

Haleigh Rice
Bangor
LD 2114

Testimony of Haleigh Rice
Neither for nor against LD 2114

Good afternoon, Senator Rafferty, Rep. Murphy, and distinguished members of the Health and Human Services committee. The last time I had the privilege of addressing this committee, it was two years ago, and I was in the midst of transitioning out of Early Care and Education as a Childcare owner, and director. My testimony was tearfully given as I was on the cusp of selling my small business and was undeniably less than hopeful for its future. Unfortunately, my fears became reality, and the program I poured my entire life into for 15 years closed in September of this past year. I wish my story was unique; however we all know, it is not. Like countless other programs across our state, and the nation, childcare program closure is all too common.

When reflecting, the catalysts for the untimely demise of a facility that was known for high-quality ECE programming and a pillar in our community, there was a clearly defined thread of fear, uncertainty, and instability in the industry as a whole.

Arguably, the major outlier was the unknown future of private preschool offering. Combine the current transition of special education services to the public schools, and more districts expanding 4yo offerings; you drastically hinder the one major income source keeping childcare programs afloat. Childcare programs rely heavily on the revenue produced by 4yr old enrollments to maintain operations, and removing 3 year olds from the equation will inevitably contribute to the growing critical financial instability of ECE facilities.

But we all know this. This conversation is not new. These points have all been made countless times before. Many of them today. I would like to challenge you to not ignore the research. Though there are COUNTLESS peer reviewed articles available, and multiple research studies published, we still continue to ignore the data.

Regardless of the research. We push through unsupported policy based on the general interests of those so far from a real child, that the outcomes are never considered again after the bill is passed. I am currently a public Prek teacher, and I can assure you, it is NOT set up for anything other than traditional "school" offerings. It is barely developmentally appropriate for a 4yo, let alone any younger. Due to no fault of their own, districts are committed to outdated approaches, streamlined curriculums, and teaching that can be easily assessed for data collection and not what's best for the development of the whole child. Having worked for 15 years in a private, play-based, child-centered classroom environment, the difference in the experiences these children are receiving is shocking. Children are overstimulated, emotionally exhausted from unrealistic expectations, and mentally drained from developmentally inappropriate environments. Then, we wonder why there is a critical spike in negative child behaviors, earlier presence of mental illness, and an increased occurrence of school refusal and general displeasure with learning as a whole long into their future. Today, I implore you to consider the research. One example for your review is The Institute of Educational Science published an article in 2022 detailing the importance of unstructured learning opportunities, and increased need for play-based learning through elementary school (Prioritizing Play: The Importance of Play Based Learning in Early Education; Caven, 2022). If our plea to save what little financial security Childcare Programs have left is not enough; please at least consider the negative implications of moving children that are too young to independently toilet, eat, dress, or in some cases communicate; to an environment not designed for their individual needs. Considering this move is directly ignoring what has been proven; time and time again by educated professionals and imposing your own will without thoroughly considering the long-term impact on students who have no say in the matter. I am not in support of Bill xxxx and strongly urge you to reconsider; if not for the profession dedicated to serving them, but for the children themselves.

Thank you,

Haleigh Rice

- Former ECE professional, current public school educator, forever and always advocate for children.