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Maine Community Action Partnership Supports LD 258, "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, 2023, June 30, 2024 and June 30, 2025"

February 21, 2023

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, members of the Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs, and Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, members of the Committee on Health and Human Services, I am Megan Hannan, Executive Director of Maine Community Action Partnership and the advocacy director for the Maine Head Start Director's Association, and we support the early childhood education provisions you are hearing about today.

First, thank you for continuing the salary supplements for all early childhood educators, including those in Head Start. These supplements help us to attract and retain talented teachers who work with children to assure they are getting their physical, emotional and educational needs met every weekday, from nutritious meals and snacks to outdoor learning to social and relationship building. The Head Start program is a data driven, well studied and a proven intervention for children of low-income families, and for many, it is the foundation for a better education experience throughout life.

Head Start is also almost entirely Federally funded. The supplements help, make no mistake, but we have had to close classrooms due to staffing shortages. We have had to turn some families away due to staffing shortages. We do not want to do that, in Head Start or any quality early education setting. For this reason, you will be seeing a bill that, among other things, includes State funding to increase access to Head Start. At this point, the State invests a bit of TANF and Fund for a Healthy Maine dollars in the program, totaling about \$2.5 million per year. For our children, we can do better.

We also support other initiatives in the budget, including continuing funding for the Maine Children's Trust and its important work preventing child abuse and neglect; and the early childhood consultation program, which relies on evidence based programming to improve outcomes for young children and their teachers who care for them.

Thank you for your time and attention.

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