

Thank you Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and members of the Health and Human Services Committee, my name is Haleigh Rice, the current owner of The Learning Garden; faith-based childcare and preschool in Bangor. I'm testifying in support of LD 2199 because though my time as a small business owner in my community is coming to a close, I feel passionately about doing my due diligence to ensure that my successor, as well as my fellow entrepreneurs, program owners and teachers do not succumb to the same fate as my beloved program.

\$45 thousand dollars. The cost of a brand new Toyota Tacoma. \$45 thousand dollars. The annual income of a full time employee making \$21.50 an hour. \$45 thousand dollars, the down payment on a \$225,000 home. \$45 thousand dollars: the average financial loss accrued by childcare centers annually by agreeing to enroll eligible families in the Childcare Subsidy Program.

\$45 thousand dollars is the loss my company experienced last year due to unpaid vacations, and unrealistic reimbursement rates. When we are already receiving reimbursement rates at 75% of our self-pay tuition rate, not being paid for students who miss days, take additional vacations, or forget to inform the department about their maturity leaves; this additional loss is detrimental. I don't need to tell you how minimal the margins are in our industry, you've been hit over the head with those stats many times before. I'm not here to beat a dead horse. I am here to rally together with my brothers and sisters in the field, to implore upon you one more time, how imperative every dollar is.

I announced to my staff and families last night that my program would be changing hands to a new owner as of March 4th. After 15 years of dedication to my community. This decision came at a time when I was covering parts of my teachers payroll with my mortgage funds. When I had not received a paycheck personally in 4 weeks - right before Christmas. - When meeting with my business advisor her response was "You need to stop taking subsidy and pay your staff less. The only way to fix this is up your revenue and reduce your overhead."

Overhead. Paying my staff a BARELY livable wage was deemed “overhead”. Safe, Consistent care and Quality education for children in DHHS Custody was deemed “overhead”. Providing affordable and reliable care to single mothers trying to obtain a degree to better the lives of their families. “Overhead”. Agreeing to receive 75% tuition on 20% of our income to assist dual-working, blue collar households was again, unnecessary overhead. In that moment I decided that it was officially impossible to maintain the vision and mission of my life's work, and still be able to make a livable wage, and keep our doors open. I have found a successor. And at this point, all I can do is pray she is able to make the necessary adjustments needed to be successful and that by the time she realizes its nearly impossible, YOU have made the hard decisions to fully fund our states programs, and do what is needed to keep our doors open.

Thank you for your time, and dedication to our children and their future.

Haleigh Rice
(Former) Owner
The Learning Garden