

Members of the committee,

My name is Nichole Johnson Higgins. I am from Blue Hill, Maine, an Early childhood educator and a small business owner in Hancock County. I am here to state I am against the proposed budget cuts against early childcare funding and feel this would be a drastic mistake to Maine communities, workforce, families, education, and businesses.

These proposed cuts will only increase poverty, subpar education, while hindering Maine's economic plans and increasing DHHS casework for children's welfare. Having been born in Maine, taken into the foster system, and adopted at age 9. I've seen firsthand the importance of support systems. As a preschool teacher, my goal is to provide a safe, nurturing environment where children can thrive, and help families break cycles of hardship with resources and support. Early education is more than just childcare, it's a foundation for growth, and these cuts will be devastating more than just financially.

A survey created by myself and a colleague was conducted on February 3rd, 2025, revealed these findings. It garnered over 700 signatures opposing the proposed cuts. The survey showed that over 4,500 families would be negatively impacted, and more than 100 providers across all counties reported that the cuts would harm their businesses leading to possible closure.

As an early educator, I'm frustrated that despite being a part of the backbone of the economy, we're underpaid and overworked. We're expected to handle the in's and outs of running a business, comply with numerous state and federal regulations, and provide quality care and education to children, all while earning minimal wages. This is unsustainable and will have drastic consequences for Maine's economy. Why are we not valued and invested in like other essential professions?

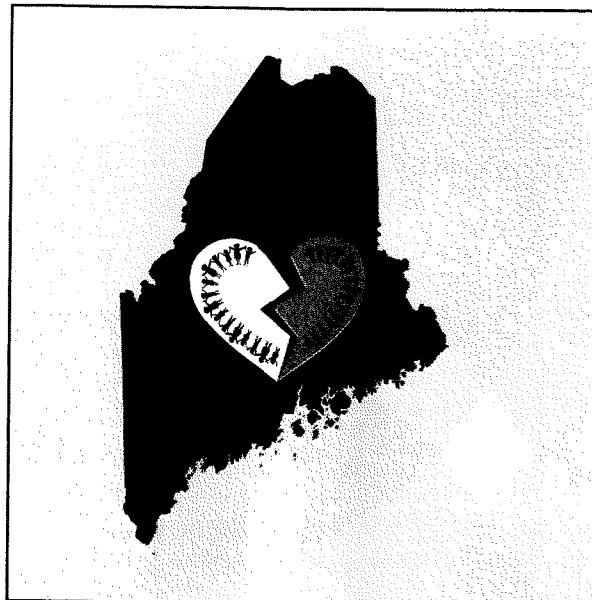
Because childcare is a necessity for working parents, unlike discretionary purchases, we can't raise our prices to the same extent as other businesses in response to economic inflation, as this would harm families who rely on childcare to maintain their livelihoods and jobs. Taking advantage of teachers' kind hearts has been a longstanding issue, but Covid has brought our importance to the forefront, and we shouldn't let that be exploited again.

I understand that budget cuts need to happen, but this is not where to do it. I understand funding issues and the need to find money at the least cost to the citizens of Maine, but this is not the correct way to go about it.

The world can change into a better place with the touch of a hand especially one that is kind, caring, and compassionate from the early years of life especially. It can also change with a touch of a hand into a place where darkness only grows. Which hand in early education is Maine going to choose?

I am not in favor of the proposed cuts, especially one's impacting business's on the brink of collapsing due to the intense ratios, rules and guidelines that are state and federally regulated without the funding of a school. Again what hand is Maine going to choose. Will you be a positive light for your workforce or will you fall into the shadows of dark cycle breaking our state.

Thank you for your time and listening to my concerns.



Mainers Against Early Education Budget Cuts

SCAN TO VIEW OVER 700 SIGNATURES

REPRESENTING OVER 4000 FAMILIES RECEIVING SERVICES

All 16 Counties represented

Over 100 Childcare Providers

