

February 24, 2025

Senator Rotondo, Senator Ingwersen , Representative Gattine, Representative Meyer, and members of the Joint Standing Committees on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Education and Cultural Affairs, thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony regarding the impact of the Governor's proposed biennial budget

I am a resident of Winslow Maine, and a preschool teacher who currently benefits from the Early Childhood Educator Salary Supplement program.

My name is Shaylie Morrison and I've been working at Woodfords Family Services for almost 3 years as an Ed Tech/Behavioral health professional, directly supporting children ages 3-6 in a 1:1 program with moderate to severe autism diagnosis' as well as other intellectual disabilities in a classroom setting. Early intervention is a key part of our students' success, and we as paraprofessionals are a vital part of what makes early intervention work. We work everyday on social-emotional skills, coping strategies, and social skills, all while working through behaviors and impediments in communication.

We have all sat with students through hard behaviors and we have all read each students behavior support plans to make sure we are helping them to the best of our ability. We all have hard days, and our students are no exception to this rule. Some days, we work through aggressions, meltdowns, property destruction, and self-injurious behaviors. Through all of these we make sure they feel heard and safe. We help them through coping strategies and redirect behavior so they can continue through their school day.

Most days, our career goes beyond just supporting the children in our classroom. We directly communicate with families and support them through the challenges they face daily as caregivers. We lend a listening ear and a supportive shoulder when our families need it. That includes loudly advocating for them and our students for services like occupational therapies, physical therapies, and speech services. We work with providers both in-person and through telehealth to give our students every opportunity to succeed.

Without the Maines Road To Quality supplement, many employees would need second or third jobs to cover their basic needs, causing their job performance to suffer as a result. They would not have the time or energy that they currently have to work with students and families day in and day out. This would also take away from not only personal time, but cause extreme burn out among a population of workers who already experience more turnover than many other professions. Which also on occasions causes our students to be called out of school and miss out on that day's services.

I urge you to think about all of the ways my co-workers and I contribute to our early intervention program. I urge you to think about not only the Ed Techs/Behavioral Health Professionals but the students and their families and the level of care we provide for them every day. Early

intervention is proven to be vital to individuals with autism and other intellectual disabilities, and sets them up for success in the future. This money that is provided to my co-workers and I helps us make sure we are at our best so that we can spend our time helping our students succeed. Thank you.