

**TESTIMONY BY JASON JUDD
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR EDUCATE MAINE**

**TO THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS AND FINANCIAL
AFFAIRS AND THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND HUMAN
SERVICES**

**IN OPPOSITION TO CUTS IN CHILD CARE AND HEAD START IN LD 210,
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, 2025, June 30, 2026 and June 30, 2027**

Monday, February 24, 2025, 10 A.M.

Chairs Rotundo, Ingwersen, Gattine and Meyer, and distinguished members of both the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee and the Health and Human Services Committee, I am Jason Judd, Executive Director of Educate Maine. Educate Maine is a business-led education organization which champions career readiness and education attainment of Maine people by supporting education along the full continuum of life – from early childhood through adulthood. We also offer research and Maine-specific data to help inform your decisions on key education issues.

I am testifying today in opposition to the portion of the Governor's proposed biennial budget that seeks to reduce General Fund spending for child care and Head Start. Specifically, I am opposing the reduction of child care educator wage stipends by \$15 million annually; the elimination of the \$2.5 million program that helps low-paid child care educators cover the costs of child care for their own children (both on page A-302); and the \$3.6 million reduction in General Fund support to Maine's 11 regional Head Start programs. (on page A-321).

We take this position because child care is critical for Maine's workforce development. High-quality child care is an integral part of early childhood development, and is an economic necessary for working parents. Child care is the workforce behind Maine's workforce.

Child care educators face persistently low wages due to chronic underinvestment in early childhood education. Thanks to many of you, your former colleagues on these Committees, and the leadership of Speaker Fecteau and former Senate President Jackson, in recent years Maine has made strides in acknowledging the value of child care educators; however, progress is tenuous. These proposed budget cuts threaten to reverse that progress.

The proposed Head Start cut of \$3.6 million would result in 250 of Maine's poorest and most at-risk children losing their high-quality early learning programs.

Attached to my testimony is a factsheet on the current status of Maine's child care workforce, and I'd like to highlight some of this to help you in your deliberations. There are an estimated 7500 early childhood educators working across Maine. Their care sets the stage of kindergarten readiness and allows parents and caregivers to work. Sixty percent of child care educators are younger than 40. Ninety-three percent of child care educators are women, and 93% are white. Forty-six percent of child care educators have less than 5 years of experience. This is another post-pandemic reality: more experienced early educators have left this field and thus Maine is on the beginning of a cycle in which we need to recruit, train/mentor and retain new educators and leaders in this critical field. Forty-eight percent of child care educators have an Associate degree or higher.

The current mean annual wage of a Maine child care educator is \$34,150, which is \$16.41/hr. This is **WITH** the current wage stipend. If the proposed budget cut to child care wages is enacted, the hourly wages will be reduced by \$1.25/hr. – which would lower that hourly wage to \$15.16 – or approximately \$31,500 annually.

Looking at the wage supplement program, in 2024, 7,381 child care workers, on average, received a monthly wage stipend. In 2024 the wage stipends were tiered to incentivize and reward education, training and experience. Fourteen percent of child care educators received the highest tiered stipend of \$540/mo. With this highest tiered wage supplement, level 7/8 child care educators are earning \$3600 more annually than educators at Tiers 1-4, thus boosting their annual incomes to \$37,750. Many of these educators have master's degrees and/or more than 10 years of experience in this field.

According to the 2024 Early Childhood Workforce Index from the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, child care educators are paid in the bottom three percent of all U.S. occupations. Another way to say that is that 97% of all jobs in our country pay better than child care.

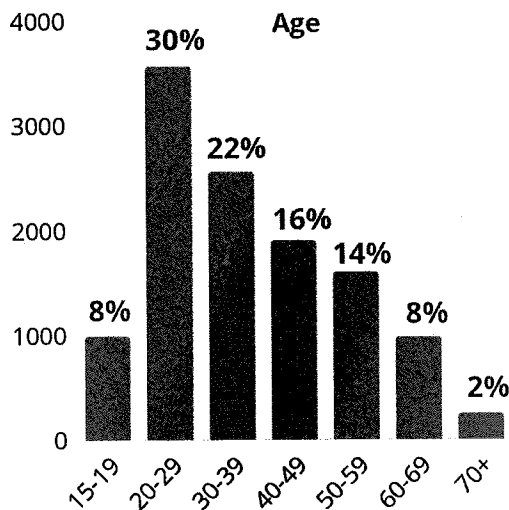
Further reducing wages for child care workers, the small incentive offered to child care educators who need child care for their own children, and Head Start funding moves Maine backwards, not forward. I urge Committee members to reject these proposed cuts.

Maine's Child Care Workforce

CHILD CARE EDUCATORS ARE THE "WORKFORCE BEHIND THE WORKFORCE."

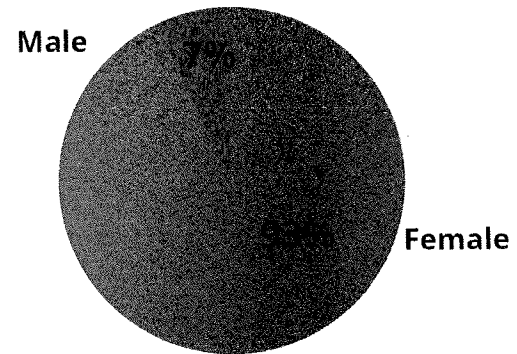
There are estimated to be ~**7,500** early childhood educators working across Maine. Their care sets the stage for kindergarten readiness and allows parents and caregivers to work.

60% of child care educators are younger than 40. Over one third is younger than 30.



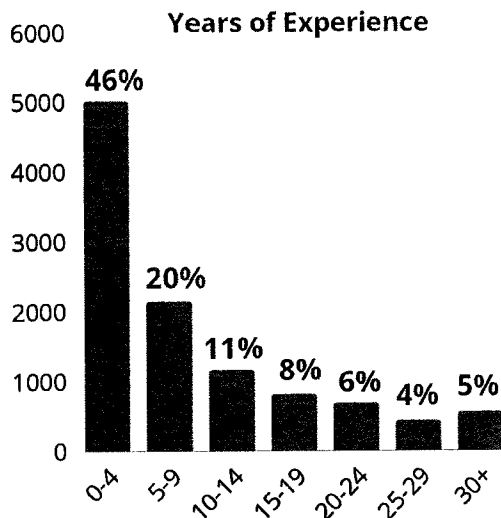
93% of early educators are women.
93% of early educators are white.

3% identify as Black/African American, 2% as Hispanic, 1% as American Indian or Alaska Native, and 1% as Asian.



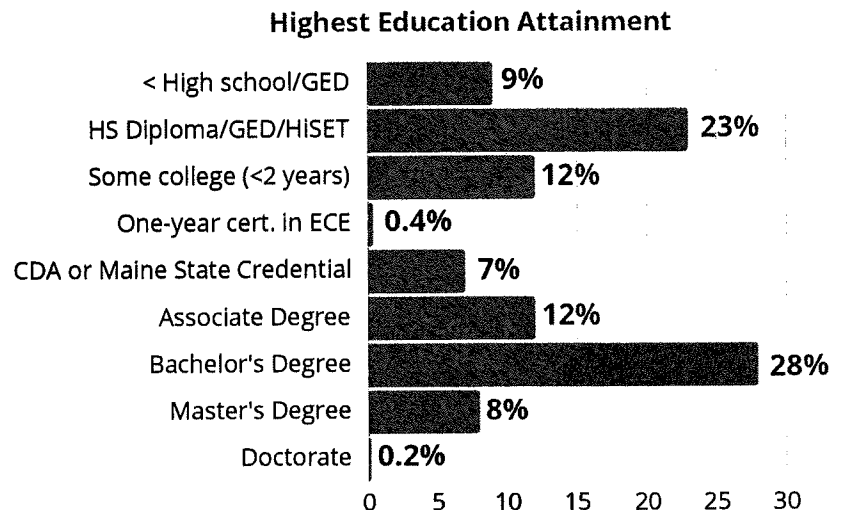
46% of child care educators have under 5 years of experience.

Two-thirds have less than 10 years of experience in the field.



48% of child care educators have an Associate degree or higher.

36% have a Bachelor's degree or higher, comparable to statewide trends.



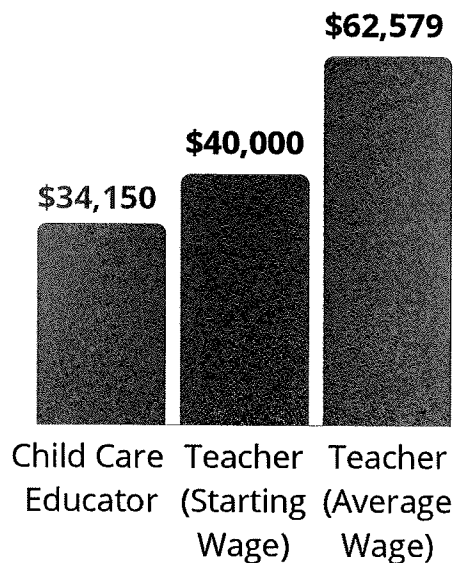
Maine's Child Care Workforce

CHILD CARE EDUCATORS FACE PERSISTENTLY LOW WAGES DUE TO CHRONIC UNDERINVESTMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION.

Maine has made strides in acknowledging the value of child care educators, however, progress is tenuous. Proposed budget cuts threaten an already unstable field.

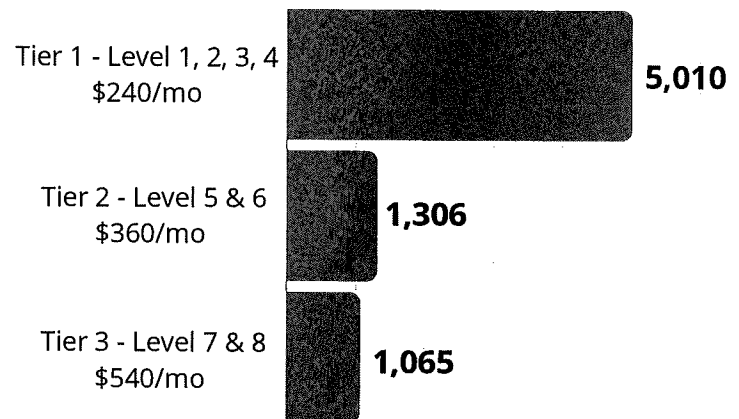
The mean annual wage of a child care educator in Maine is \$34,150 (\$16.41/hr.).

This is considered below living wage for a single adult.



7,381 people, on average, have received monthly wage supplements in 2024.

The proposed budget plans to rollback a significant portion of these monthly wage supplements to our child care educators.



Note: Wage Supplements are tied to MRTQ Career Lattices. Level descriptions can be found [here](https://www.mrtq.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/MRTQ_Lattices.pdf): https://www.mrtq.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/MRTQ_Lattices.pdf

Takeaways

- Given the long hours and **low wages** (average \$16.40/hr) in the field, Maine's child care educator workforce is relatively **young and inexperienced**.
- There is significant turnover in the field, however, specific figures are hard to come by. **Maine's Department of Health and Human Services does not collect data on child care worker turnover.**
- According to the [2024 Early Childhood Workforce Index](#) from the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, child care educators are paid in the bottom three percent of all U.S. occupations.
- Child care is the workforce behind every other workforce in Maine.** Additionally, child care is a meaningful, intensive occupation that provides tremendous benefit to families, businesses, and communities. Wages are not commensurate with the value our early educators provide.