



**maineaeyc**

Maine Association for the  
Education of Young Children

Testimony of Morgan Tolin

On behalf of

The Maine Association for the Education of Young Children

In opposition to L.D. 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

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Health and Human Services Committees, my name is Morgan Tolin, Co-Executive Director of the Maine Association for the Education of Young Children.

We are in opposition to the proposed biennium budget cuts that include

- Reduces funding by \$30 million over the biennium approved in Public Law 2023, chapter 412, for the child care employment award program, which includes child care staff in the Maine Child Care Affordability Program.
- Reduces funding by \$5 million over the biennium approved in Public Law 2023, chapter 412, for the child care employment award program, which includes child care staff in the Maine Child Care Affordability Program and would eliminate all funding for this program.
- Reduces funding by \$7.2 million over the biennium approved in Public Law 2023, chapter 412 for the delivery of Head Start services to support families up to 185% of the federal poverty level.

I stand before you today alongside members of the early care and education workforce to emphasize just how critical child care is to the fabric of Maine's economy. Child care is the workforce behind the workforce—without it, parents face enormous barriers to employment, which ultimately affects our state's productivity and economic growth. Reliable, affordable child care is not a luxury—it is a fundamental building block for a thriving workforce.

The educators who provide child care are often the unsung heroes of our economy. They are shaping the next generation while supporting the families of today. Without a stable child care workforce, we lose the ability to nurture both. But right now, we are dangerously close to losing more of them.

The Governor’s proposed \$15 million annual cut to the Child Care Educator Salary Supplement Program is a direct threat to the stability of an already fragile industry. With child care educators earning, on average, only \$16.40 an hour—roughly \$34,000 annually—it’s a struggle to make ends meet, let alone attract and retain qualified professionals. Cutting this program in half would essentially cut the average child care professional’s wage by over \$2,000 annually. This program is NOT a bonus, it is an investment in the foundational wages that educators need to pay their light bills, have heat in their homes, feed their families, and maybe splurge on their first retirement plan or fix their vehicle. I ask, how many of us here would stay in a job that reduced your wages by \$2,000?

2023 Hourly Occupational Employment							
Geography: Statewide							
Occupational Group: Personal Care and Service							
Area Name	Occupation Title	F	Estimated Employment	Average Wage	25th Percentile	Median Wage	75th Percentile
Maine	Childcare Workers		4,340	\$16.42	\$14.63	\$16.35	\$17.41
	Animal Caretakers		1,160	\$17.36	\$15.00	\$16.54	\$17.67
	Recreation Workers		1,130	\$18.11	\$15.30	\$16.80	\$20.85
	Hairdressers, Hairstylists, and Cosmetologists		1,090	\$25.16	\$18.13	\$22.62	\$28.77
	Amusement and Recreation Attendants		920	\$15.09	\$14.18	\$15.09	\$17.00
	Exercise Trainers and Group Fitness Instructors		900	\$22.30	\$16.87	\$20.01	\$23.82
	Ushers, Lobby Attendants, and Ticket Takers		520	\$15.53	\$13.81	\$15.00	\$16.71
	First-Line Supervisors of Personal Service Workers		510	\$22.75	\$19.09	\$22.31	\$26.06

Blank cells indicate that an estimate is not available. Certain estimates are suppressed from publication to meet confidentiality or data quality requirements. Wage estimates above the processing limits of the statistical software are also blank. Only annual wages are provided for teaching occupations and certain others, resulting in blank cells in the hourly wage type. Note: Data for Maine (Statewide), the metropolitan areas of Bangor, Lewiston-Auburn, Portland-South Portland, Portsmouth NH-ME, Dover-Durham NH-ME, and the Balance of State Areas, are derived from the May 2023 Occupational Employment & Wage Statistics survey. County-level estimates are locally developed using the same OEWS methodology but have not been reviewed by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Source: Maine Department of Labor, Center for Workforce Research and Information.

Maine has made progress in our child care workforce. The number of educators enrolled in this program grew from 6,800 to 7,700 in almost a single year—an 11% increase. This is proof that investments in our child care workforce work. But cutting funding now would undo that progress. We cannot afford to go backward. In a state that already loses an estimated \$400 million annually due to a shortage of infant and toddler care, reducing support for child care educators is not only ill-advised; it is a grave mistake. We cannot jeopardize the future of our children, who depend on these dedicated professionals for their early education and care.

ReadyNation’s new national study found that America’s infant-toddler child care crisis now costs the nation \$122 billion in lost earnings, productivity, and revenue every year. This staggering economic toll impacts working parents, their employers, and the nation’s taxpayers. Our 2018 study found that the crisis was already severely damaging the pre-pandemic economy, exacting a cost of \$57 billion annually. A combination of COVID-19 and insufficient policy action have now significantly worsened the crisis.

Maine’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) represents roughly 0.33 percent of the nation’s GDP. That suggests that the lack of reliable child care for working parents of young children, up to age 3, could come to an estimated \$403 million in annual costs for Maine.

I am one of the lucky recipients of this award who isn't on the 400+ person waiting list. Before, the subsidy program only covered \$100 a week of my child's daycare, and I was still paying \$136 each week to the school. Saving over \$500 a month has been the reason I have not had to look for a job outside of childcare just to afford to have my daughter go to school while I work in the same building. It would be a huge financial blow to lose the award after only having it a few months. This award helped me afford to pay off the back pay I had incurred trying to keep up with the subsidy payments. It isn't repetitive as the governor claims as the subsidy doesn't fully cover all the costs for most childcare workers and we still end up with a financial burden to do our work when we rely on it.

But it's not just about wages—it's also about the benefits that make these jobs viable. Maine's Child Care Employment Award, which offers tuition assistance to those working in licensed child care programs, is a crucial lifeline for recruitment and retention. The demand for this program was overwhelming when it was introduced—within just three months, the funds were exhausted, serving 400 child care professionals, with around an additional 400 left on a waiting list. These funds provide a path to a sustainable workforce and a future where Maine's children receive the best possible care.

Cutting this support now would only make the problem worse, driving away workers at a time when other benefits to retain them are scarce.

Head Start, too, is a pillar of our commitment to our children's futures. The \$3.6 million annual state investment in Maine's Head Start programs serves approximately 1,742 low-income children. Eliminating this funding would put 180 children at risk of losing access to critical early education and wraparound services. These programs offer more than just education—they support the well-being of children and their families, ensuring they start life on the right path. If we cut funding to Head Start, we not only hurt these children—we risk losing millions of dollars in federal funding, which would hurt all of Maine's children in the long run. At a time when federal support is not guaranteed, we need you all to protect these children and families.

We also remind you that there was language omitted in the Supplemental Budget which would allow allocated general funds for the Child Care Affordability Program to cover eligible families making between 0%-125% state median income. Without this language change, allocated money is going unspent while families sit on a waitlist. We would encourage you to include this language in the Biennial Budget.

**PART N Sec. N-1. 22 MRSA §3731-A, sub-§1 as enacted by PL 2023, c. 643, Pt. RRR, §1 is amended to read: 1. State funding to support eligible families. Other Special Revenue Funds and General Funds allocated for the purposes of supporting the Maine Child Care Affordability Program may be used to support any eligible family.**

In short, a budget reflects a state's values. Cutting funding to child care and early education programming sends a harmful message: that the work of caring for our children is less important. That message undermines the very foundation of our future economy and well-being. The return on investment in child care is too great to go back on. These cuts are not just devaluing our

educators—they risk the stability of our future, for our children, and for the economic vitality of our state.



INVESTED IN EARLY  
CHILDHOOD YIELDS A  
**\$16 RETURN**

**INCREASED**

- High School Graduation
- College Matriculation
- Economic Development & Personal Income

**DECREASED**

- Special Education/Remediation
- Dependence on Social Welfare
- Crime-related Costs & Incarceration Rates

Nobel Prize-winning economist James Heckman found that every \$1 invested in quality early childhood programs generates \$4 to \$16 in returns. The earlier we act, the greater the impact—for kids, families, businesses and communities.

I urge you to stand with Maine's child care workforce, with the families who rely on them, and with our children who are counting on us to make the right choice.

No cuts to child care or Head Start. Not now. Not ever.

Thank you.