



Testimony of Kailina Mills
in opposition to
LD 210: The Biennial Budget

Representative Rotundo, Senator Hamper, and honorable members of the Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs, my name is Dr. Kailina Mills, and I am the Farm & Forest School Director at Ketcha Outdoors in Scarborough, Maine. I oppose LD 210: The Biennial Budget.

The Ketcha Outdoors childcare programs, including our preschool and afterschool, currently serve nearly 100 families. These programs provide children with safe, nurturing, and enriching care that connect children with the outdoors and their local community. These programs are a critical component of our state's infrastructure to support working parents and our economy. These programs are only made possible by our hardworking, qualified staff.

Though we provide high quality, enriching care to the children of Maine, childcare workers continue to be among the lowest paid workers in Maine. Low pay is the number one reason that childcare workers leave the field. When childcare workers leave the field, children, families, and the economy suffer. With fewer workers providing care, fewer children can access the quality childcare that sets them up for success in school and work for decades to come. When fewer children can enroll in childcare, fewer parents and caregivers can go to work. When fewer caregivers can go to work, businesses suffer. Childcare workers are the workforce behind the workforce, which is why the Maine legislature doubled the investment in the Child Care Worker Salary Supplement program in 2023. This small investment has enabled many qualified educators to enter or return to the childcare workforce in a short period of time, opening opportunities for children and families across the State.

I am one of those educators. I started my career teaching in preschools. However, the low pay soon drove me out of the field. Though I am extremely qualified and passionate about early education—I have a bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degree in the field—I was not able to work in early childhood education due to the low wages that most childcare programs offer. Once the funding for the Salary Supplement program doubled in 2023, I was able to return to the field to provide high-quality education to the children of Maine.

The salary supplement currently allows me to pay for my wifi bill, electric bill, and two weeks of groceries every month. It has made a significant difference in my family's life. Without this supplement, I will likely not be able to stay in my chosen field and contribute my expertise to the care and education of children in our State, and I am not alone. Since late 2023, 900 more people have joined the childcare workforce in Maine. With this sizable increase to the workforce, more children and families have been able to access childcare, allowing children to get high-quality education and families to go to work. Cutting the funding for this program now



would drive more people out of the childcare field, exacerbating the childcare crisis in Maine and further destabilizing the childcare workforce that supports the rest of Maine's workforce.

The Governor's proposed cuts threaten the stability of childcare providers and undermine the quality of early childhood education. Our educators--who play a crucial role in shaping the future of Maine's children and supporting Maine's economy--deserve support, not cuts. These reductions would only increase the challenges families face in accessing affordable, high-quality care.

I urge you to stand with Maine's children and childcare workers by rejecting the cuts to childcare proposed in LD 210 and advocating for the funding necessary to support Maine's future.

Respectfully submitted,

Kailina Mills, EdD

Farm & Forest School Director, Ketcha Outdoors, Scarborough, Maine