



Testimony of Jami Pollis in Opposition to 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

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee and Health and Human Services Committee, my name is Jami Pollis and I am the Infant Toddler Partnership Manager for Kennebec Valley Community Action Program's (KVCAP's) and Educare Central Maine's Early/Head Start program in Waterville.

I am in opposition to the proposed \$3.6 million annual/\$7.2 million biennial cuts to general funds for Head Start. Head Start implements high quality early childhood education programming for children with low income. There are currently 11 Head Start programs in Maine serving over 1,700 children. 25% of those children are children with identified disabilities. 24% of those children are experiencing homelessness. In addition to high quality early childhood programming, Head Start also provides comprehensive services to the families of the children being served including assistance with housing, job training, higher education, access to health care, dental care, and mental health services. Head Start programs provide education on parenting, health, nutrition, and healthy relationships to the families of the children being served. A cut of \$3.6 million annually will result in 180 fewer children being served and the families of those 180 children will not receive the support they have previously benefitted from to attain goals that they had set for their family. A minimum of 9 classrooms across the state will have to close and even more classrooms may have to return to part day programming impacting a family's availability to be a part of the work force or participate in training and education programs.

In addition to direct educational and comprehensive services to children and families, Head Start also partners with many public school systems across the state supporting their public pre-K programs. Our Early Head Start program at Kennebec Valley Community Action Program also partners with 9 community based early care and education programs in Central Maine. We call that program HomeStart. Not only does HomeStart allow for comprehensive Early Head Start services to reach eligible children and families beyond the walls of our own buildings, HomeStart also supports the professional development of the educators who run those programs providing opportunities to strengthen the quality of programming available to all children and families across the State. The positive impacts of all of the partnerships that our 11 Head Start programs across the State not only offer direct impact on children and families, but they have sustainable impacts on early childhood programming across the State of Maine. A loss of \$3.6 million annually will have an impact on the reach of our partnerships.

The landscape of early care and education in the State of Maine is already severely stretched. Children and families do not have the access to the quality of care that they deserve. Cutting the Head Start budget will only exacerbate that problem and make it more challenging for a stretched workforce and early education system. Research shows that the brain development that occurs in the first 5 years of life is critical. The overall brain development and neural connections that happen during this crucial time lay the foundation for all future learning and success. All children and families deserve to have high quality environments that will facilitate that learning and growth for their child and themselves.

I am urging you to reconsider these proposed budget cuts and remember that Head Start and high quality early childhood programming is an essential investment that will benefit every member of our State.