

Testimony of Annie Colaluca before
the Committee On Appropriations and Financial Affairs and
the Committee on Health and Human Services
in opposition to
LD 210, the Governor's proposed Biennial Budget
February 13, 2025

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, Senator Ingwersen, and Representative Meyer and distinguished members of the committee, my name is Annie Colaluca and I'm the Executive Director of Early Learning and Family Services for the Bath Area Family YMCA.

I am testifying today in opposition to proposed cuts to two critical initiatives:

- Elimination of the Childcare Employment Award program,
- and the reduction in the Childcare Worker Stipends from \$30 million to \$15 million annually

For nearly 20 years our nationally accredited childcare program has provided high-quality, affordable childcare for children ages 18 months to five years old in southern midcoast Maine. We currently provide care to 92 children across six classrooms, led by an amazing team of 27 full and part-time teachers.

We have been fortunate to see our childcare program grow considerably over the last three years, even as other childcare providers in our community have had to close their doors. We are currently in the process of constructing two dedicated Early Learning Centers in Brunswick and Bath that will allow us to care for 230 infants, toddlers, and preschoolers by 2026.

This growth in our program would not be possible without the support and investments made by the state of Maine. The proposed cuts in this budget would jeopardize our ability to hire and retain high-quality educators and keep costs low for families in our community.

My teachers are an amazing group of people. They're dedicated to their kids and their work. For them, this is their career – not an entry-level job on the pathway to something else. But across our industry, long hours, low pay, and a lack of benefits have forced many great teachers out of this field.

One of my teachers shared in written testimony that the support from the stipend program has given her the financial stability to work fewer hours at her second job, improving her quality of life and avoiding burnout. Just as importantly, she said this support has made her feel *seen* and *valued*.

If we want to invest in the long-term prosperity of families in our state we need to invest in quality, affordable childcare. And you cannot do that while devaluing the work of the educators who make it possible.

Early childhood educators are the workforce behind the workforce. They are the infrastructure that allows parents to participate in the workforce, grow our economy, and provide our youngest Mainers with a strong foundation for the rest of their lives.

I urge you to oppose these harmful cuts. Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to take any questions.

Annie Colaluca

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