

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer , and members of the Health and Human Services Committees, my name is Jolene Blake and I am the owner and director of Circle of Friends childcare in Presque Isle.

I am speaking here today to urge you to support LD 1955 An Act to Increase Child Care Affordability and Early Childhood Educator Stability

Childcare providers across the state have been fortunate to receive the monthly Salary Supplement Award, which has helped to increase their pay to a more livable wage. Childcare provider staff with children who have applied for the Childcare Employment Award have been able to stay in the field without worrying about how they would pay for the care of their own children. Lastly, families rely on the Childcare Affordability Program which allows them to work outside the home and attend school to further their education.

The cost of childcare is largely based on the economy. When costs increase for providers, those costs must be offset by increasing our childcare rates for families. If there are any cuts made to the programs that are essential for families and providers, it would have a devastating effect on the childcare industry. Cuts to any of these programs would not only affect providers but those costs would be passed directly on to families.

Family Childcare providers and Center owners are mostly self-employed small business leaders who do not have the availability of benefits. The Salary Supplement award for some providers can help pay for private insurance or a private retirement account. Some providers use the monthly award to reinvest in families in their care allowing them to keep their rates lower than they normally would. Some of the staff have voiced that their award pays for their transportation costs, heating bills, medical bills, and their housing costs, all of which are essential services

The Child Care Employment Award is absolutely essential in keeping childcare professionals with children in the field so they can work help to provide for their families in today's economy.

It needs to be stated that when childcare providers enter the field, they do so with the understanding that they will not make a lot of money, but they will possibly make a difference to a family or a child in need. As a director, I see the imbalance in the pay structure that providers receive verses what they are worth for the hard work that is needed in our industry. We provide care and teach the most important parts of society. We teach future teachers, leaders, bankers, social workers, and even politicians.

Please consider investing in Childcare. We cannot continue to lose funding when we are the workforce behind the workforce providing care for our littlest people in society.