

Testimony to the Joint Standing Committees on Appropriation and Financial Affairs and Health and Human Services

Regarding LD 390, The Biennial Budget

February 24, 2017

Senator Hamper and Representative Gattine, Senator Brakey and Representative Hymanson, and members of the Joint Standing Committees on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Health and Human Services, my name is Dan Coyne and I am speaking today on behalf of the ten United Ways of Maine (“United Way”) regarding LD 390, “An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations for the Expenditures of State Government, General Fund and Other Funds and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2018 and June 30, 2019.” I am here to oppose the proposed cut to Head Start in the Governor’s budget and to comment on Child Development Services (CDS).

We recognize that you and your colleagues face difficult decisions in passing a biennial budget as well as in evaluating several public policy priorities worthy of consideration. We strongly believe, however, that investments in early childhood programs, like Head Start and CDS, represent essential investments in the health and development of our children. Such investments are a down payment on a future productive workforce.

Brain research supports the critical importance of the first five years of life, with eighty percent of brain development occurring before the age of three. Early intervention for the most vulnerable children will generate perhaps the greatest payback. **Full-time early education from birth to Kindergarten would increase Maine’s high school graduation rate for children from low-income families to 90%.**¹ We must focus on early childhood in order to strength Maine’s future economy.

Head Start is one of those critical programs that help children and their families with the greatest need, and the greatest potential to achieve better outcomes for our state. Head Start serves three- to five-year-old children from families with incomes below the federal poverty level or who qualify for public assistance. In addition to comprehensive early care and education, children are offered health, nutrition, vision, hearing, and mental health services. Head Start connects families to community services and resources, offers transportation and home visits, family literacy, and vocational supports. **When children have the opportunity to attend Head Start, parents have the opportunity to work or pursue their education.** This is a situation in which both children and parents benefit.

Yet, there is a significant unmet need for Head Start services in Maine. Only 30% of eligible children are currently enrolled, and 1,139 of Maine’s future workforce are on program waiting lists. The loss of this state funding will increase this unmet need, negatively impacting Maine’s future economy.

¹ Philip Trostel, “Path to be a Better Future: The Fiscal Payoff of Investment in Early Childhood Development in Maine.” Margaret Chase Smith Policy Center & School of Economics, University of Maine (April 2013). http://melig.org/pdfs/Path_to_a_Better_Future_Full_Report.pdf.

Maine's Head Start programs are facing a loss of \$1.8M a year. The Governor's budget proposes to cut all General Fund support (\$1.2M a year) for Head Start, and does not include an additional \$575,000 a year that was included in the last biennial budget.

What we need to do is maintain investments in programs like Head Start because they help children succeed while helping prevent more costly future public expenditures to address substance abuse, violence, and crime.

All ten United Ways in Maine have been and will continue to be committed partners in supporting early care and education in our communities. United Ways, however, cannot singlehandedly provide the resources capable of sustaining funding for Head Start, and other worthy early care and education programs. United Ways can supplement, but not supplant, the role government can and must play in this area.

For all these reasons, we urge you to oppose these cuts to Head Start.

To close on a positive note, this budget does provide additional support (\$1.48M a year) for CDS as they identify learning and behavioral disabilities in children ages 0-5 years and provide them with Early Intervention and Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) under the supervision of the Maine Department of Education. United Way welcomes this commitment to making CDS available to Maine children. Identifying and addressing disabilities at an early age leads to better outcomes for children and Maine's future economy.

Thank you for your time, leadership, and service.