

Madam Chair, members of the committee: My name is Patricia Dahl (D-A-H-L). ~~HB~~ a member of HB2 the Montana Advocates for Children representing the Montana Head Start Association. To begin, let me thank this committee for its past support of child care in Montana...your efforts have helped many young Montana families in their journey to become self-sufficient. I am also the Head Start Director for L&C, Broadwater and Jefferson counties and we serve 248 children and their families. I am here today to ask you to do **whatever you can** to promote the market rate increase for child care providers who serve families at or below 150% of poverty.

All children who attend care out of their home, regardless of their family's income status, should have access to quality care. Research has provided us with data that shows children who have access to quality early childhood education have better high school graduation rates, do better economically, have less adolescent pregnancy, are employed and pay taxes rather than receive welfare, and on and on. Quality early childhood education in Montana is provided to many children through their child care provider. We owe it to our children to support their early childhood educators – or we may lose the ones we have and already we do not have enough.

Quality care providers give parents peace of mind so they are able to do their jobs **and stay** with their jobs. Of the 248 children in our Head Start program, we typically have 150 children each year whose families need child care so they can work. My program offers full day services to 36 children each year and I can tell you I am dependent on the childcare dollars that help support my program. I know too that other providers are dependent on child care dollars to help keep their programs going.

We need to value the folks in Montana who care for our youngest citizens. We need to support our child care providers; they are many of the small businesses here in Montana. Supporting child care providers supports working parents who help support our State through their payment of taxes.

We say children are our most valuable resource. Let's walk our talk. Please support a rate increase for child care providers. Supporting child care providers in the State of Montana is good business.

Thank you for hearing my testimony today.

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