

H. 194

Good evening. My name is Dawn Irwin and I live in Essex. As a preschool teacher and a mom, I have the unique perspective of feeling the financial burden affecting the field of Early Childhood Education from both sides.

As an educator, I have been forced to accept working at an unlivable wage, which has caused ripple effects throughout my entire career. It took me ten years to get my bachelor's degree and teaching license because I couldn't afford to go to school, and ~~there were~~ no programs existed that allowed me to work fulltime and still be able to fulfill the state's student teaching requirements. It's also put undue pressure on my husband, making sure he could carry most of the financial responsibilities for our family.

As a mother of two young children, we have had to make extremely difficult financial decisions about our family that will impact us for the rest of our lives ~~do~~^{due} to the cost of childcare. If I wasn't able to bring my children to the school I work at and take advantage of an employee discount, my husband and I wouldn't have been able to afford having a second child. The cost of childcare, even with my employee discount, costs more than our mortgage. I know that my story isn't unique and that is completely unacceptable.

I'm here to urge you to show your support for my family and hundreds of other families across our beautiful state and provide the full funding amount for H. 194. Teachers, like me, deserve the educational incentives offered in the bill to help them reach their career goals. And families, like mine, should have access to the monies allocated to help alleviate the cost of childcare, like the Childcare Financial Assistance Program. Thank you.