

**Boston City Council Committee on  
Healthy Women, Families & Communities**

# **Recommendations for Early Education and Childcare**



**Report to Members of the Boston City Council**

**December 2018**

**Presented for the Committee by Ayanna Pressley, Chair**

## Background

Early education and child care has become increasingly unaffordable for families around Massachusetts, especially those living in high cost areas like Boston. According to the most recent study, the Commonwealth is one of the most expensive places for childcare — second only to Washington, DC. Nationally, the typical working family spends about \$28,354 for in-home care and \$9,589 for center-based care.<sup>1</sup> In Massachusetts, that figure is well above the average with families in the Greater Boston area paying as much as \$35,000 for at-home care and \$14,960 for center-based care annually.<sup>2</sup> Costs can vary for a several different reasons, including age of the child and where a family lives, as is the case in Massachusetts.

Affording childcare has become a major source of concern for families across the City of Boston. Rising inequality and demographic changes in the region show that nearly one-third of families with children under five years old are at or below the federal poverty line (\$16,460 for a family of 2 and \$25,100 for a family of 4).<sup>3</sup> Costs continue to exceed the affordability standard set by the US Department of Health and Human Services which defines affordable childcare as consuming no more than 10 percent of a family's budget.<sup>4</sup> With a median income of \$35,000 per year, Boston families are spend close to half of their incomes on care — a burden that disproportionately falls on low-wage families. However, childcare is no longer a problem borne only by poor and working class families. Today, more than 80 percent of Boston's families have childcare

costs that exceed the 10% affordability standard.

Childcare can cause substantial strain on families across various income and social brackets, forcing them to make difficult choices regarding where they live, work, or go to school. Additionally, families must find alternative options for childcare, or risk leaving the workforce altogether to take on childcare responsibilities themselves. Unfortunately, being a stay-at-home parent is not an option for everyone. In Boston, 55 percent of all children live in single-parent households and nearly 25 percent are immigrants or children of immigrants.<sup>5,6</sup> These families must often rely on informal networks of care such as family members or friends or seek out public assistance (if they're eligible).

Additionally, while the City works to improve the affordability, availability, and quality of childcare it must also address the challenges in the early learning workforce. The childcare workforce is critical to the City's economy and should therefore be provided with living wages, tuition support, and professional development opportunities like other small businesses across the region. For instance, the Institute of Early Education Leadership and Innovation reports that children under 5 spend up to 50 hours per week in childcare settings. This represents a critical time for brain development between ages zero and four when about 80 percent of brain development occurs, yet early education providers rarely receive adequate support or investments to improve services or advance their professional skills and training.

For a large portion of children living in the United States, early education and childcare

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<sup>1</sup> State of Childcare in the US. Care.Com. November 15, 2018. <https://www.care.com/care-index>

<sup>2</sup> State of Childcare in the US. Care.Com. November 15, 2018. <https://www.care.com/care-index>

<sup>3</sup> Federal Poverty Level. HealthCare.Gov. November 15, 2018. <https://www.healthcare.gov/glossary/federal-poverty-level-fpl/>

<sup>4</sup> Government Accountability Office. November 2018. <https://www.gao.gov/assets/690/681652.pdf>

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<sup>5</sup> Massachusetts: The Best State for Children? Institute of Family Studies. <https://ifstudies.org/blog/massachusetts-the-best-state-for-children/>

<sup>6</sup> New Bostonians Demographic Report. [https://www.cityofboston.gov/newbostonians/pdfs/dem\\_report.pdf](https://www.cityofboston.gov/newbostonians/pdfs/dem_report.pdf)

(EEC) environments provide the building blocks for child development. EEC is broadly used to describe various types of educational programs that serve children before and during preschool, consisting of enrichment activities aiding in social and cognitive development. Child development experts agree that the period from infancy to age five is a critical window in laying the foundations for social, emotional, language, and skill development, and can often predict adult social and cognitive function.

Moreover, a growing body of evidence suggests intensive early child education programs through age five lead to positive effects on intellectual development and academic achievement, particularly for children from low-income families.<sup>1</sup> Early child education experiences also have substantial short- and long-term benefits on a variety of developmental outcomes including interactions within family dynamics, language and math ability, memory, and attention skills.<sup>2</sup> Variability in the quality of these experiences often have significantly more meaningful impact on children from at-risk backgrounds.<sup>3</sup> Education acquisition contributes to the growth of labor productivity, and policy research suggests that high-quality universal pre-school could add \$2 trillion to the annual United States Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 2080.<sup>4</sup>

### **National Trends**

Head Start was one of the first early childhood education initiatives in the United States and served as a federally funded initiative through the Department of Health and Human Services.<sup>1</sup> Since then, state preschool programs have emerged as a primary provider of early child education services. The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) examines state-funded preschool education programs meeting the following criteria:

- The program is funded, controlled, and directed by the state
- The program serves children of preschool age
- Early childhood education is the primary focus of the program
- The program offers a group learning experience to children at least two days per week
- State-funded preschool education programs must be distinct from the state's system for subsidized child care
- The program is not primarily designed to serve children with disabilities, but services may be offered to children with disabilities
- State supplements to the federal Head Start program are considered to constitute de facto state preschool programs if they substantially expand the number of children served and if the state assumes some administrative responsibility for the program

Surpassing its peak enrollment in 2016, more than 1.5 million children have enrolled in state-funded preschool program nationally since 2017. State funding per child increased from \$4,976 to \$5,008, and total state funding for preschool rose two percent to \$7.6 billion nationally.<sup>5</sup> Most developed nations spend about 0.8% of their GDP on EEC, where as the United States spends only 0.4% or fifty percent less on average.<sup>7</sup>

### **Local Trends**

Massachusetts established its Department of Early Education and Care in 2005 to improve quality, affordability, and access to preschool education services. The state's Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK) initiative is a universal program serving children from 2.5 to 5 years of age. Programs eligible to receive grants through the initiative include

public schools, Head Start programs, family child care, faith-based, and private-child care centers. In 2016, the Pre-K initiative programs enrolled almost 8 percent of state 4-year olds and 7 percent of state 3-year olds.<sup>5</sup> Massachusetts' early education state programs also meet benchmarks examining standards for cultural sensitivity, quality improvement, and alignment with other state standards and child assessments.

Despite these achievements, Massachusetts ranks among the lowest in the nation in regards to EEC access and spending per child. Limited access can be defined as geographically limited, restrictive hours of operation, and high costs. On average, Massachusetts spent less per child who was enrolled in early child education compared to what the nation spent collectively.<sup>6</sup>

The state's Department of Early Education and Care recently developed a Five Year Strategic Plan (2014-2019) intended to outline tasks, objectives, and measurable outcomes to achieve the Department's priority to provide a foundation supporting all children in the state. This plan highlights a number of strategic directions organized in terms of commitment to quality, increasing access, continuing communication and advocacy, and sustainable infrastructure and finance.

## Policy Recommendations

The Early Education and Childcare (EEC) Policy Briefings hosted by the Boston City Council's Committee on Healthy Women, Families, and Communities between February and December 2017 influenced the recommendations outlined in this report Briefings covering the following topics:

- Childcare for Homeless Families
- Community Based Providers
- Childcare Funding Mechanism

- Transitioning from Daycare to School
- Childcare for Parents with Non-traditional Work Schedules
- On-Site Childcare in the Workplace
- Expanding Childcare Access

Following the briefings a set of recommendations were developed to address the multitude of challenges residents and providers across the city face when it comes to navigating the increasingly complex early education and childcare system. These recommendations are drawn from four primary issue areas that came up repeatedly throughout the hearings: access, equity, financing, and workforce.

## IMPROVING ACCESS TO EARLY EDUCATION & CHILD CARE

- Make early education and childcare a citywide priority.
- Designate an official agency of early education and childcare and/or hire an early childcare advisor. Many large cities, including New York City, have found that a dedicated early childcare agency or advisor that is focused exclusively on the needs of children under 5 can increase the city's capacity to not only be leaders on this issue, but to meaningfully and effectively impact the lives of working families. An agency and/or advisor can proactively take on issues like the creation of public/private partnerships, grant support, publication of resources, and assistance with workforce recruitment.
- Use existing infrastructure to monitor and collect data. The City of Boston collects a wide range of data about children and families through its

various departments and agencies and can use this information to better understand early childhood needs, including neighborhoods where services are located, types of programs/centers around the city, program accessibility by neighborhood, areas of greatest need, and workforce data (e.g., turnover rates, wages, provider to child ratios). This information can be used to spotlight growth patterns and to predict future citywide needs.

- Review and update citywide zoning regulations for family-based child care providers.
- Map, monitor, and evaluate the ratio of EEC center and children with unmet EEC needs. Require reports to be published annually on steps to improve availability and reduce existence of childcare deserts.

## **MAKING EARLY EDUCATION & CHILD CARE AFFORDABLE**

- Advocate for increase state and federal funding. The city can lobby for increased state and federal funding to support the expansion and reach of child care subsidies.
- Expand both the amount and eligibility criteria for federal and state childcare subsidies.
- Expand the number of child care subsidies under the Child Care Development Fund so that more families are able to receive this critically needed public benefit.
- Identify solutions aimed at reducing the financial burden placed on working families. For instance, the

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services considers child care to be affordable when it is 10% or less of a family's income. The city should find ways to incentivize and encourage local businesses to provide high quality low-cost childcare onsite, or creating public-private partnerships to support high quality learning opportunities, such as "early learning scholarships" for low-income and middle class families.

- Provide a living wage for working families across the city so they are able to meet basic cost of living needs. The city and employers should raise the minimum wage, for both tipped and non-tipped workers to a living wage of at least \$15 per hour. More than half of children in Boston live in single-headed households, the city should work to ensure that these families are able to meet their basic needs, including childcare costs.

## **ENSURING EQUITY IN OPPORTUNITY & SERVICES**

- Expand access to licensed child care facilities that open during nontraditional working hours (i.e., nights, weekends, and holidays). This includes, increasing funding mechanisms for 24 hour/7 day a week providers and allowing certification of and subsidy supports for relatives providing in-home care.
- Review reimbursement rate policies annually to ensure provider compensation is competitive and on par with inflation.

- Incentivize local businesses to offer child care assistance as part of employee benefit program.
- Ensure that early learning curriculums are created in such a way that preserves children's native languages and enhances dual language abilities.
- Invest in diversity training to support educators on how to interact with dual language learners and create a safe, welcoming classroom environment for students from a vast array of backgrounds.
- Create a streamlined voucher system for families experiences homelessness. This system will allow shelter staff to provide vouchers to families utilizing their services to cover childcare costs.
- Incentivize childcare center in close proximity to shelters to reserve no less than ten percent of their total allotted spaces for homeless infant, toddlers, or youth.
- Educate families, shelters, schools, and child care centers on the rights of homeless individuals. Families should not be stigmatized nor fear removal of their children from childcare because of sudden homelessness.
- Increase funding for transportation services for families experiencing temporary homelessness such as a government sponsored MBTA bus or link pass.
- Offer more robust and affordable child care options at colleges and universities that will support nontraditional students with children. This might include the creation or

expansion of dedicated funding to support student parents by offering free or inexpensive child care.

- Publish a resource guide for families. Many parents may not be aware of resources available in the community to educate and support their childcare needs, such as the Earned Income Tax Credit, SNAP/WIC programs, free or low-cost health insurance, public housing supports, and child care or transportation subsidies. A resource guide could therefore be offered through local libraries, community centers, public offices, and/or a city webpage.

## **RECRUIT, TRAIN, & RETAIN A DIVERSE WORKFORCE**

- Host annual job and resource fair dedicated specifically to early learning and child care. The city of Boston should invest resources in recruiting top talent in the EEC field, partnering with local colleges/universities with early ed programs, and informing the public about educational opportunities in their neighborhoods.
- Support professional development opportunities. Officials in government, business and community can partner to invest in and build professional development program for the early childcare workforce. These programs can provide resources like funding for travel and tuition so that parents can obtain the degree requirements and licenses needed to earn more money, advance in their career, and earn over time, this will help offset

employment shortages in early childhood jobs outside of the public school system.

- Invest in trauma-sensitive programs and support for providers who may be facing second-hand trauma or certain triggers while on the job. Often, our providers and educators must deal with challenging issues on the job such as homelessness, neglect and abuse, fear of deportation, etc. The city should invest in resources to support the needs of children but also the needs of the providers who are with them daily.

## ACCESS

Access is defined by the availability and affordability of a service. When referring to access throughout the report, we are looking at geographic availability of the EEC centers, the hours of operation, quality of care, and costs.

### **Options for Childcare and Preschool Education**

A number of options exist to provide EEC services for Massachusetts families. For low-income families, many of the childcare options are free or inexpensive and may include family child care (FCC), in-home child care, pre-school, or day care centers. Options for EEC for low-income families are included in Appendix B.

Many of these programs operate on a voucher system, requiring parents of low-income children to meet stringent requirements and opt into these services. Additionally, these forms of free and subsidized child care opportunities have long waitlists--inhibiting timely access for young children. In fact, as of January 2017, almost 24,000 children under 5 years old were on the Massachusetts waitlist for state-subsidized early child education and out-of-school care. Moreover, the rising cost of childcare not only impacts access to high quality childcare for lower income families, middle class families have faced challenges with affordability as well. Geographic location and limited building structures to house EEC centers has also proven to be a significant challenge for families across the state. Centers are closing due to financial troubles, citing that lagging state subsidies make it difficult to enroll more lower-income children.

With high costs, low-income families are unable to register without subsidies due to

high expenses. Between 2011 and 2016, 3,562 early education programs closed in the state, creating additional barriers and increasing the demand for childcare. EEC center closures are detrimental to the already high demand in unmet need.<sup>12</sup> In 2013, Massachusetts legislators created the Early Education and Out of School Time (EEOST) Capital Fund, which granted capital funds to childcare providers across the state to improve existing or create new child care program facilities. Most recently in 2017, an additional \$4.1 million was given to five programs--one program facility based in Roxbury.<sup>13</sup> These funds have allowed the state's early education system to increase its capacity, serving increasing numbers of children and improving the physical environments for over 2000 children. Of the 2000+ children impacted by the capacity-building efforts of EEOST, 86% are children from low-income families. Programs, like EEOST, have been impactful in decreasing the number of children not receiving EEC.<sup>13</sup>

### **Long Wait Times**

Long waiting lists for EEC programs has also made childcare inaccessible to many working families. Most of these programs have income eligibility criteria. For example, to qualify for the Department of Transitional Assistance caregivers have to be already employed or participating in an approved ESP activity, including self-directed job search or community service. In addition to approved activities required for parents, children must also meet criteria, including restrictions on age, documentation of receiving foster care benefits, or being under court supervision to qualify for child care services. Restrictive eligibility criteria and complicated referral structures for inclusion in child care service programs make it difficult to navigate social services and discourage families who may have limited understanding of the the local or state child care system. Subsidized systems

for child care should strive to eliminate barriers for those families most.

## FINANCING

The cost of EEC has become increasingly unaffordable for families, particularly those with infant children. Massachusetts ranks as one of the most expensive places for child care, second only to Washington, D.C. Costs vary for a variety of reasons, including age of child, region, and type of childcare provided. Infant care can cost an average family over \$17,000 per year, and nearly \$13,000 for a toddler. For many families with two small children, the price of childcare often exceeds mortgage/rent and groceries. Massachusetts is one of 33 states where the price for child care is more (by about \$6,360) than sending an 18-year old to an in-state college or university.

In Boston, one-third of families with four-years old are below the federal poverty line. About one-quarter of families live just above the federal poverty line, which is about \$48,000 per year for a family of four. As of 2015, approximately 21% of residents lived below the poverty level.<sup>9</sup> For a family making minimum wage, it would take 43 weeks per year to pay for just one infant in daycare.<sup>8</sup> As previously mentioned, the US Department of Health and Human Services considers child care to be affordable when it is 10% or less of a family's income. Yet, at a median income of \$35,000 per year, many families are forced to spend upwards of 50% of their incomes on care unless they find alternative options. The burden of such high cost care disproportionately falls on low-income families. According to recent data from the Economic Policy Institute, middle class families pay about 8% of their incomes toward childcare, while low-income households average 30%.<sup>10</sup> The large financial burden can drastically limit social mobility, force parents to cut back on work

hours, seek out care on the unregulated cheaper market, rely on family, friends, and neighbors, or leave the labor market altogether to take on childcare themselves. Unfortunately, dropping out of the workforce is not an option for single parent households who must then rely on informal networks for care or seek out the limited subsidies and/or vouchers offered through public assistance.

### Massachusetts EEC Landscape: Funding Streams

As noted earlier, the current system for funding child care services is fragmented and difficult to navigate: Massachusetts is forced to patch together a variety of funding sources to keep its child care system afloat, but the funding streams each come with their own requirements. Appendix A shows how funding makes its way down from Washington, DC to the state house and then down to providers and families.

The following subsections outline the most utilized funding streams in the Massachusetts and local EEC system.

### Subsidies

For low-income families, the key to affording child care is often dependent on qualifying for subsidies through public assistance. The subsidized child care system is meant to provide quality care and early education opportunities to children from low-income families in Massachusetts and other states whose parents are working or meet other service criteria based on their eligibility status (e.g., teen parents, homeless parents, or parents with an open DCF case).

Currently, licensed child care providers serve 58,300 children from birth through age 13 through two types of subsidies: contracts and vouchers. In Boston, approximately 29,800 children are eligible for the subsidy program. Subsidized providers are reimbursed by EEC for

serving children with subsidies; parents are charged a weekly fee which varies by their income. An estimated 64 percent of likely subsidy applicants were served, leaving 5,500 unserved children, fewer than any region other than the suburban areas west and south of Boston. While a large portion of children receive subsidies (over one-quarter of child care slots in the state are filled by children with subsidies), there are many challenges with the system in its present form.

**Supply and Demand.** The need for subsidized child care in Massachusetts drastically surpasses the supply, a harsh reality in many other states as well. Neither the federal or state government have guaranteed enough subsidies to help all economically disadvantaged families with child care. Therefore, the subsidies only cover about one in six eligible children. When there is no available spot for a child, that child remains on the waiting list. Over the past few years, the size and compilation of the waiting list have been points of contention in the state. The current MA waitlist is comprised of approximately 26,000 families.

**Eligibility and Restrictions.** States set very low income eligibility levels for subsidy help, which restricts the already limited number of families who have access to relief. This process greatly limits a family's ability to both afford and access the child care they need to continue working and meeting their other basic needs, especially if their incomes falls above the eligibility requirements. Additionally, subsidized care is not always directed to the states most vulnerable children, including those who are homeless or in foster care (about 4,000).

**Low Reimbursement Rates.** For those families who both qualify and are able to receive subsidy relief, reimbursement rates are often too low to offset the cost of most

child care. By law, states are required to use up-to-date rates based on current market surveys, but many use data that is outdated by as much as ten years. The result of this discrepancy can cause hesitancy among many quality-rated child care centers to accept subsidies, therefore placing a larger financial burden on caregivers. For businesses that do accept the subsidies and thus allow reimbursement rate, they must often resort to finding other funding streams through private-public partnerships, fundraising, and external grants to make up for loss in revenue.

**Income Gaps.** Moderate-income families who are just above the federal poverty line do not qualify for subsidies and face a substantial financial burden due to child care expenses. Many families earn just over the income eligibility threshold but still cannot afford the high cost of child care. In Massachusetts, families of four are eligible for subsidies if they earned under \$48,000. Families that do not receive subsidies struggle to afford the high cost of care. According to Child Care Aware of America,<sup>12</sup> in Massachusetts the cost of child care for a family of four above federal poverty level where child care costs for center-based and home-based care would be 29.3% and 20.9% respectively. As previously mentioned, child care should account for 10% of income so not only do these families not qualify for financial support via the subsidy program, they must allocate a larger percentage of their take home pay to cover child-care related expenses.

It should also be noted that the vast majority of low-income children who qualify for the subsidy program across the state Massachusetts are children of color. In Boston, Hispanic children make up 54 percent of those eligible, while non-Hispanic black children make up 34 percent. The remaining 12 percent include children who

are white, Asian, or multiple races.

### **Tax Credits and Breaks**

Tax credits are another option for working families to offset some of the costs associated with child care. For qualifying families with one child, upon filing state and federal taxes, they may be eligible for a tax credit up to \$3,000 (and \$6,000 for 2 or more children) which can come as a relief for many parents. Massachusetts allows families to exceed the federal allowance for the care of a qualified child under the age of 13, resulting in an a tax credit of \$4,800 for one child, and \$9,600 for two or more. Despite the elevated difference in federal and state deductions, there are many limitations to the kind of relief these credits provide.

### **Challenges with Current Tax Credit:**

*Work Requirements.* The tax credit requires that parents be working or looking for work. This is not always feasible for families, particularly if the primary caregiver is on disability and unable to work.

*Qualified EEC Providers.* The credit can only be applied to “qualified” child care, which means care provided by a family member or the child’s parent would not meet the standard for families to qualify for this deduction.

*Geographic Disparities and Reduced Impact.* The tax credit falls short in high cost states like Massachusetts. As previously mentioned, it can cost up to \$17,000 annually in Massachusetts to care for one infant child, making the \$4,800 tax credit woefully inadequate for families. Alternatively in states like Arkansas, where salaries are nearly half that of public school educators who average \$40,462.<sup>11</sup> Child care providers themselves are paid very little, many of them depending on public benefits. Stressors like inability to afford

the average cost for child care can run as low as \$6,590 per year, the tax credit provides greater financial relief to families as it can result in savings of nearly 50 percent.

*Annual Disbursement.* The distribution of the tax credit is limiting, as its only given out once per year. This payment structure provides very little relief for low-income families making monthly or weekly payments.

### **Wages**

Another factor in the funding challenges for EEC programs is increasingly wide wage disparities among early education providers and other professional educators. EEC educators are not provided livable wages and often struggle with expenses related to child care for their own children and housing costs. According to MA Legislature, approximately 90% of EEC workers have reported being unable to afford cost of living because of non-livable wages.<sup>12</sup>

High quality EEC programs depend on a high quality workforce of early education providers. In order to retain quality staff, liveable wages need to be provided to staff. Currently, EEC workers make almost half that of public school educators. Low wages are factors linked to the turnover rates of 30%.

EEC workers play a crucial role in molding young children and supporting their developmental needs and school readiness. On average, subsidized early education workforce has a salary of \$25,001-\$27,500, compared to \$22,501 - \$25,000 for center-based educators. Both

basic cost of living can affect retention rates. In order to have a long-term committed staff who are able to build relationships with their families, they need to

be paid livable wages that are tied to inflation.

## EQUITY

Another fundamental gap in the early education and childcare system in Boston is equity. Significant disparities in income, housing, and educational opportunity create barriers to EEC programs. In Boston, half of children live in single parent households;<sup>14</sup> and the median income for working families is \$102,757, which is over \$7,550 more than the state average.<sup>15</sup> The rising cost of food, rent and transit can stretch a limited income and pose as a significant barrier to accessing quality childcare.

Accommodations to provide an investment in EEC placement in underserved communities and in areas with a proven number of childcare deserts must be a top priority for the city. Furthermore, the city needs to be intentional in its investment in more varied EEC services as more caregivers begin to work nontraditional work hours, move in and out of transitional housing, seek employment, and go back to school. In a world-class city like Boston, it is unacceptable that EEC programs remain out of reach for those families, affecting school readiness as they enter school age.

### ***Nontraditional Work Hours***

A growing number of caregivers work majority of their hours outside of the traditional 8AM to 6PM daytime schedule, including nights, weekends, and early mornings. Irregular schedules are unpredictable and tend to change by season, week, or day to day. Often workers are given limited notice about work schedule changes and are expected to be available at any time, forcing last minute changes to child care responsibilities. This share of workers is only expected to grow with the projected expansion of jobs in industries like nursing, retail, hotel and food

service, which prompts the urgency for forward facing steps in addressing the need for after hour and/or round-the-clock child care.

In Massachusetts, there are more than 500,000 working mothers, of whom 10% of have infant children.<sup>16</sup> About one-quarter of those women are single working mothers and nearly 14% of them are employed in low wage jobs.<sup>17</sup> Often, working mothers must find flexibility job opportunities or risk turning down offers with rigid work hours. In many instances, these women have left the workforce altogether because of unavailable or unaffordable childcare options. A growing number of low income mothers typically work nonstandard hours and are desperate for child care. However, child care in Boston is the second most expensive in the country, close to \$18,000/year per child. There is a large waiting list for women needing child care while looking for a job; in 2001, there were 18,000 children on a waiting list for child care systems and currently there are over 24,000.

In the Greater Boston area, 40% of children in families that are eligible for child care subsidies have a need for care during nonstandard hours. The lack of non-standard child care options means parents have to pass up on job opportunities, higher earning shifts or overtime, continuing education or training opportunities, and other opportunities that fall during non-standard hours. Irregular or unpredictable hours create more challenges, especially for families who are relying on subsidies; because subsidies can be terminated for irregular use and providers also find it difficult to accommodate irregular use of subsidy slots or vouchers because their reimbursement is based on actual hours providing care. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, jobs with nonstandard hours are among the fastest growing occupations. If trends hold

and interest lasts, companies will have to start thinking of new ways to provide families with opportunities to address challenges in childcare. This might include, 24-hour notice before adding shifts, onsite childcare, paid leave, and other options. In some states, qualification for child care subsidies are tied to number of hours worked. Therefore, decreased hours can lead to loss of child care benefits, which then leaves parents unavailable to work, even when shifts become available.<sup>18</sup> One such example of this is the Fair Work Act 2009 (FW Act, 2009) which provides employees with a legal right to request flexible working arrangements.

### **Homelessness**

Massachusetts faces high rates of homelessness with 6,645 children ages 0-18 years participating in the statewide Emergency Assistance Shelter System. Massachusetts has the highest number of homeless families in the nation.<sup>19</sup> A third of the children mentioned live in Boston. Of the 6,645, 46% of the children were under the age of six years old. Nearly 90% of homeless children under five do not have access to early education programs.<sup>19</sup>

As childcare costs rise and waitlists grow, families experiencing homelessness are hit hardest by inequities in the EEC system. Without flexible childcare, caregivers find it impossible to attend interviews, go to classes, and remain employed. These barriers prevent families from gaining economic stability, breaking the cycle of homelessness, and increase the likelihood of developmental delays amongst children.<sup>19</sup>

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 90% of the child's brain is developed by six years old, a time period of critical physiological development.<sup>20</sup> Lack of EEC services can negatively affect developmental delays, including effects on a child's

social-emotional, cognitive, and physical development.<sup>20</sup> Children facing homelessness are more likely to be affected with learning disabilities and develop emotional-behavioral disorders.<sup>21</sup>

Equitable access to quality child care, both affordable and geographical, would reduce disparities homeless families face by allowing parents to further their job search and for children to be in an educational environment earlier in life. There is a need for streamlined access for families where they are able to easily and quickly access vouchers or additional funding supports and reduce waitlist time period. When children do receive quality early education and childcare, they show improvements in academic achievements and increased school readiness. Long-term effects are reduced crime rates and teen birth rates, enhanced employment opportunities, higher incomes, and better health outcomes.<sup>20</sup>

Horizons for Homeless Children is a prominent example of a Boston based organization focusing on serving homeless families through various programs and supportive services. They provide quality care to each participant and are accredited through the National Association for Education of Young Children (NAEYC) with an established curriculum. Horizons is highly ranked program with Level 3 ranking from the Quality Ratings & Improvement System.<sup>21</sup>

Horizons showcases a platform for prioritizing needs of homeless children through their four pillars: (1) early education services, (2) playspace program, (3) family partnerships program, and (4) policy and advocacy. Horizons is able to support families with services such as case management, educational programs, and advocating on behalf of families to create paths toward stability and breaking the cycle of homelessness.<sup>21</sup>

### **Childcare Deserts**

Child care deserts are areas with limited or no access to quality childcare and are unavailable during nontraditional hours; predominantly in low-income rural areas.<sup>22</sup> Massachusetts is not currently meeting the need for quality EEC programs.

Over 300,000 children under six years of age live in Massachusetts, however, 40% of children are without care. A deeper look into the municipal level shows geographical disparities among Greater Boston and within the city itself. Certain zip codes contain more child care deserts than others. For example, East Boston has 1,346 of unmet childcare slots whereas Brookline has 369.<sup>12</sup> In Massachusetts overall, 2 out of 5 children from working families have an unmet childcare need. This disparity in service providers can impact families in these areas by stretching limited resources and negatively impacting employment opportunities and school readiness.

## **WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

There are six types of EEC professional qualifications certification including, Infant-toddler Teacher, Infant-toddler Lead Teacher, Preschool Teacher, Preschool Lead Teacher, Director I, and Director II.<sup>23</sup> Each position varies with education and work experience in their requirements. The chart in Appendix C describes the qualifications for certification regarding each position.

### **Professional Development**

Professional development opportunities are crucial for educators to provide quality care to improve the development of children. Two gaps contributing to stagnant workforce development have been identified. The first is lack of business supports and the second

is lack of leadership development.<sup>24</sup> Professional development invests in the child's future. Low investments in trainings are barriers to future investments in children.<sup>10</sup>

Currently, educators working outside the public school system do not receive compensation for attending trainings, preventing them from gaining resources to enhance their skills. Many are unable to pay out of pocket for such trainings due to low wages and many EEC educators do not receive livable wages and therefore rely on federal programs for support.

Professional development opportunities can lead to high quality of care for children and further increase their school readiness and development of skills. Effective professional development can increase retention, reduce burnout and turnover rates because there is an investment placed on educators and support towards expanding their knowledge to better serve children and families.

Potential training opportunities can include trauma informed care, cultural competency, and working with children with special needs to enhance the care provided to youth. Such trainings support the child as a whole by identifying barriers in place outside of the childcare setting and addressing the concerns to increase educational attainment.

### **Dual Language Learners**

A shift in racial, ethnic, and linguistic demographics in Boston have created a greater need for a culturally competent early education workforce. Thirty percent of the city's population is foreign born and nearly one-third of the children speak a language other than English.<sup>9</sup> Early education must therefore be structured to accommodate the unique needs of an increasingly diverse population.

One way the city can do this is by offering dual language learners (or children who are learning two languages at the same time) an environment to learn in both English and the language they speak at home.<sup>25</sup> Achievement gaps between American students from different income brackets, and between students of different races and ethnicities, appear before kindergarten begins, and sometimes peak at ages 5 and 6. EEC programs can play a critical role in reducing these gaps and building school readiness among children with diverse linguistic backgrounds.<sup>10</sup>

Implementation of workplace diversity trainings can strengthen the relationship educators have with children and support their increased learning capacity. These trainings can help create stronger relationships with families and give educators and administrators the tools to provide a safe and culturally inclusive environment for parents to feel comfortable and engaged. A diverse staff helps provide a safe and culturally inclusive environment where parents feel comfortable and engaged.

## CONCLUSION

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts has made progress in increasing access and quality for Early Education and Care in recent years. However, families continue to face barriers in accessing quality EEC, close to home, for many reasons. Families are faced with a lack of affordable options and limited availability of quality providers, with or without subsidies. Many of the most vulnerable children who are low-income, first generation, and/or disadvantaged are often disproportionately disenfranchised, further exacerbating negative outcomes for their development. Policy changes need to be implemented in order to ensure equal

access to early learning services, close the achievement gap, and create better health and life outcomes that for every every child in the City of Boston. This report is the consolidation of first hand testimony before the Boston City Council Committee on Healthy Women, Families and Communities and highlights recommendations from community partners for city, state and federal governments as well as private and non-profit institutions. This report is meant to be a starting point for our collective work to address challenges facing our Early Education and Care system.

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## [INSERT NAMES OF PEOPLE WHO GAVE TESTIMONY ETC]

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