

## A Call to Action: Support of Critical Childcare Legislation

*By Jenna Terio, MSW*

Massachusetts lost [over 50% of its early education and care \(EEC\) jobs](#) at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in April 2020, and while progress has been made, the workforce is still below pre-pandemic levels. Many workers were forced to leave the field when the pandemic hit and [programs shut their doors due to increasing health concerns](#). As the years of the pandemic dragged on, many who worked in the EEC field left seeking [higher paying career opportunities](#). Research has shown that EEC workers across the board in Massachusetts are paid [35.2% less than those working in the K-8 system and experience a poverty rate of 15.3%](#). In 2021, the average childcare staff member in Massachusetts earned [less than \\$39,000 annually](#), far below what is needed to afford even moderate [housing in Massachusetts](#). In fact, research has shown that Massachusetts residents need an [annual income of at least \\$78,984 to afford a two bedroom home at fair market rate](#).

The loss of EEC workforce has [led to the closure of numerous programs and exacerbated the preexisting shortage of EEC slots open for children](#). Estimates before the COVID-19 pandemic suggest that there were [305,790 children ages 0-5 identified as potentially needing EEC](#) while at the same time, there were only 202,440 slots available to children and families in the state. This means that there were 103,000 fewer EEC openings than needed, which represents 33.8% of the children who were identified as having a need for EEC.

Many Massachusetts-based advocates and legislators have made efforts to address the EEC shortages and workforce crises through [budget allocations and legislation proposals](#).

These efforts have seen mixed success and there is still a desperate need for additional support for the EEC field. With the new governor's administration in place as of this January, it is an opportune time to reignite these efforts in the new legislative year. Bills such as [An Act providing affordable and accessible high quality early education and care to promote child development and well-being and support the economy in the Commonwealth \(H.489/S.301\)](#) should be at the forefront of the conversation as it seeks to bolster the EEC workforce and make care more affordable for families. The passage of this bill would provide critical financial assistance to families to lower the cost of care, increase funding sources for providers to match the cost of providing high-quality education and care, and use operational grants to increase compensation of EEC staff through increased salaries, benefits, bonuses, professional development, and access to continuing education opportunities.

The Common Start Coalition, which is a statewide partnership of organizations, providers, parents, early educators and advocates working together to make high-quality EEC affordable and accessible to all Massachusetts families, commissioned a recent poll which found that [58% of registered voters support increasing taxpayer funding for EEC services](#) across the Commonwealth. This was a 10 point increase from a similar survey that was conducted in 2020. This poll also found that [72% of voters believed that EEC workers should be paid significantly more than \\$30,000 per year](#). These results demonstrate that the majority of residents of Massachusetts are ready for greater investments in early childhood infrastructure,

including efforts to bolster the EEC workforce.

It is well-documented that access to high quality childcare and early childhood education has significant benefits for children's development and for the functioning of families and communities. Access to high quality EEC leads to [improved high school graduation rates, increased college enrollment, and greater future earnings potential for children](#). Access to safe, developmentally appropriate, and supervised EEC is essential so that parents can work to make ends meet. Access to EEC allows parents to [remain in the workforce, advance their careers, and support their households financially](#).

To be sure, the upfront costs of investing in EEC can be costly. However, the [Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation](#) finds that "insufficient child care costs the Massachusetts economy roughly \$2.7 billion in earnings, higher business expenses, lost productivity, and foregone tax revenue each year." Clearly there are significant costs to Massachusetts not investing further resources into the EEC field.

The current EEC staffing crisis is a pivotal moment for Massachusetts, one that will have serious consequences for children, families, and society for many years to come. Passage of [An Act providing affordable and accessible high quality early education and care to promote child development and well-being and support the economy in the Commonwealth \(H.489/S.301\)](#) is needed to begin to address the EEC crisis in Massachusetts. Contact your legislator today (contact information [here](#)) to urge them to consider supporting this bill and others like it.

*Jenna Terio received her Master's Degree in Social Work and completed the Early Childhood Policy and Leadership Fellowship from Boston College.*