



Response to Special Legislative Early Education and Care Economic Review Commission

by the Community Advisory Committee
of the Massachusetts Early Childhood Funder Collaborative

Dear Chairs Lewis, Peisch, Michlewitz, and Rodrigues:

We thank the Early Education and Care Economic Review Commission (hereafter, “the Commission”) for issuing its [March 2022 final report](#) with 14 recommendations for investment and systemic change in the early education and care field. We strongly urge you, the Massachusetts Legislature, to:

- Fund all immediate recommendations of the Commission’s report in the fiscal year 2023 state budget,
- Implement the short- and long-term recommendations of the report as soon as possible, and
- Work to establish high-quality early education and care as a “public good” accessible to all children. Build an early childhood system that meets the needs of each family and supports our early educators in providing high-quality early care and education.

The [Massachusetts Early Childhood Funder Collaborative](#) (MA ECFC) is a statewide philanthropic collaborative of over 25 individuals and foundations who support the early childhood sector. We work to strengthen the community of early childhood funders and drive policy and systems change to support the Commonwealth’s youngest residents and their families. Our vision is that all young children in Massachusetts have the opportunities and supports they need to thrive. Our work is informed by and done in collaboration with a Community Advisory Committee (CAC), composed of 17 early childhood leaders, including practitioners, parents, and advocates. This letter originated from our CAC, who share our priorities and are our community partners in advocacy.

At the March 17 meeting of the MA ECFC, a panel of CAC members reflected on the Commission report:

“As a large early education and care provider in Springfield, we serve on average about 500 children every day. 100% of our children are subsidized. 30% of those 500 children are involved with DCF, homeless or have a teen parent. We have a high level of high risk children and families that are receiving services. The Operational grants and **C3 grants have been critical to our being able to support these families - but they are not enough.** Without them, we have averaged a \$500,000 loss each year on our early education programs; with them, it is \$100,000 - still a loss - because the reimbursement rate does not reflect the true cost of care. This means I have to continue fundraising, to find donors to support the work we’re doing at Square One to meet that gap. So they’re wonderful grants, but the system was really broken prior to this.”

- Dawn DiStefano, President & CEO of Square One (Springfield)



In our view, the Commission report recommendations are a good and necessary start to addressing long-standing inequities in our field. These recommendations, centered around four focal areas, align with MA ECFC's own [strategic priorities](#) of supporting:

- increased investment to support young children and their families,
- family-strengthening infrastructure,
- a high-quality early childhood workforce, and
- economic sustainability for service providers.

The commission's report reflects the reality of today's broken system. We must move beyond the crisis we are in today and build a bigger, better, more equitable system for the state at large, one that ensures access to high-quality services for all families, regardless of income. Massachusetts prides itself on being the "Education State". And yet, in early education and care, in the concept of lifetime learning, there's much to be done. We, as stakeholders, are quite aware of that.

"It is critical that we work quickly towards ensuring that our educators make a family-sustaining wage, and have entry and growth opportunities. It is disheartening to me as an agency leader knowing that a portion of my Head Start early learning staff are clients of the agency where they work because of the low income that they make. We are working with very prescriptive and restrictive government (state and local) contracts. **We are really sort of pigeonholed by what we can pay people**, and that just simply needs to change. We really need to professionalize this industry. We want an industry that people feel that they can grow with, that they can be educated and move forward with, that there's a career path. The recommendations that are set forth in this document really lay the groundwork for that."

- Kerri Perry, President & CEO of Community Action, Inc. (Haverhill)

Massachusetts must implement the report recommendations **AND go further** to achieve that vision. High-quality early education helps all children have a strong start in life. It is essential to a thriving economy, and helps families, communities, and society as a whole. Public funding should be prioritized for families with the fewest resources, but we cannot stop at ensuring access just for the most disadvantaged. We must move more quickly and responsibly to implement the report recommendations, grounded in a vision that all our children are entitled to high quality early education and care. Without this, we will have missed a critical opportunity.

"The report indicates a heavy involvement with the family, and includes a section on accessibility, but **the only way we can truly understand what their needs are is by asking them directly, versus us assuming what their needs are**. One of the things that we do is meet the client where they are, but that's not just physical space. It also means speaking their language, and assisting with technology needs. When they come to the office, they are already in high need of services. Our early childhood services operate as part of our whole family approach, so that means that if they're having issues with housing, we figure out where they need to go. Local partnerships are key to this effort."

- Lilian Romero, Chief Program Officer at Lynn Economic Opportunity, Inc.



Our state is in the midst of a childcare crisis that impacts the health and wellbeing including mental health of all ages and demographics, including young children and their families. Establishing a high quality early education and care system is part of the solution to this crisis, as high-quality, consistent, and reliable care is a support to families in crisis.

Members of the MA ECFC would be happy to work with you on this vision. Please fund the immediate recommendations of the report now, and continue working on a long-term vision of a high-quality early education and care for **all** young children. The Commonwealth’s future depends on it.

Sincerely,

MA ECFC CAC and Steering Committee

Community Advisory Committee	Steering Committee
Titus DosRemedios, Strategies for Children (<i>co-chair, Steering Committee representative</i>)	Brian Gold, MA ECFC <i>Director</i>
Latoya Gayle, Neighborhood Villages Action Fund (<i>co-chair, Steering Committee representative</i>)	Karley Ausiello, United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley (<i>co-chair</i>)
Sunindiya Bhalla, Roca	Turahn Dorsey, Eastern Bank Charitable Foundation (<i>co-chair</i>)
Anne Nemetz Carlson, Child Care of the Berkshires	Paul Belsito, Irene E. & George A. Davis Foundation
Dawn DiStefano, Square One, Springfield	Ayesha Cammaerts, Boston Children’s Hospital
Jacqueline Gallo, Lynn Public Schools	Lydia Magliozzi Icke, Commonwealth Children’s Fund
Eve Gilmore, Edward Street Child Services	Elizabeth Pauley, The Boston Foundation
Pam Kuechler, P.A.C.E., Inc.	
Kim Lucas, Northeastern University	
Kerri Sheeran Perry, Community Action, Inc.	
Lilian Romero, Lynn Economic Opportunity	
Maria Rosario, NorthStar Learning Center	
Michelle Sanchez, Epiphany School	
Aditi Subramaniam, MA Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children	
Beverly Williams, BAMSI	