



JOINT COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

TESTIMONY OF PROGRESSIVE DEMOCRATS OF MASSACHUSETTS

IN SUPPORT OF H.489 AND S.301

An act providing affordable and accessible high quality early education and care to promote child development and well-being and support the economy

May 17, 2023

Chairs Lewis and Garlick, Vice Chairs DiDomenico and Ultrino, and Members of the Joint Committee on Education:

Progressive Democrats of Massachusetts (PDM) is pleased to have this opportunity to present testimony in support of the Common Start Bills, H.489 and S.301. Thank you!

PDM is an all-volunteer group working to promote economic and social justice by supporting progressive public policy in the Commonwealth. PDM has been an active participant in the Common Start Coalition (CSC) since its creation five years ago. **Providing every child and family access to affordable, high quality, early education and child care (EECC), especially families facing economic or other challenges, is essential to putting children on a trajectory for success.**

Dependable EECC is necessary to allow parents to be productive members of the workforce. For 65% of children under age six, both parents work. Reduced productivity due to employees' inadequate or undependable EECC costs our businesses billions of dollars a year because of absenteeism and other impacts on parents' ability to work productively.

We must address the long waiting list in Massachusetts of families who qualify for a subsidy to help them pay for EECC but cannot be accommodated because of inadequate funding. Even for families who do get a subsidy, the amount the state pays EECC programs is too low to support quality services. The federal guideline says the state should pay an amount at the 75th percentile of what is available in the EECC marketplace. Currently, Massachusetts pays rates at roughly the 25th percentile. Furthermore, child subsidies, coupled with baseline infrastructure supports for providers, need to provide sufficient revenue to meet the true cost of quality EECC.

Because EECC providers must make their services as affordable as possible for parents, they cannot afford to pay their teachers enough to consistently attract and retain qualified staff. EECC teachers with a bachelor's degree receive half the salary of public-school teachers; their **average pay is less than \$24,000. About half require public assistance**, such as Food Stamps, to make ends meet. **Hence, turnover is high, denying young children the consistently high-quality services that an experienced, stable workforce would deliver and that are essential to putting children on a path for success in school and in life.**

Investments in young children and their families produce a very high return on investment (ROI), as documented by careful studies conducted over many years: \$17 returned for every \$1 invested, as calculated by the Perry Preschool Study. High-quality EECC for children, coupled with support for low-income parents, reduces the need for special education and grade retention in schools, reduces high school dropout rates and involvement with the criminal justice system, and increases children's educational attainment and their future earnings. Recent studies have found long-term improvements in health and mental health, as well as benefits for the next generation of children. These newly identified outcomes have not yet been factored into ROI calculations; they will undoubtedly increase the ROI substantially.

PDM strongly urges you to support and favorably report out a Common Start Bill, based on H.489 and S.301. Please move expeditiously to create a universal, accessible, affordable, high quality EECC system that will make Massachusetts a leader, instead of the state with the least affordable EECC in the country. The benefits for our young children and their families, as well as for our economy and Commonwealth, are incalculable.

Thank you for your time and attention.

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