

JOINT COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
TESTIMONY OF PAMELA THOMPSON 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 in the Commonwealth
October 17, 2023

Chair Lewis, Chair Garlick, and members of the Joint Committee on Education, my name is Pamela Thompson, the director of teaching and learning at Neighborhood Villages. I am here today to offer testimony IN SUPPORT of **H.489 and S.301**.

We have known for decades how important the first five years of childrens' lives are. 90% of the brain is developed by then. Countless studies show how access to high quality early education improves outcomes for individual children over their lifetime, yields benefits in the near and long term for families, and improves the economic, health, and educational wellbeing of communities.

Yet we continue to undervalue and under invest in the early education and care sector, which predominantly employs women, especially those of color.

Through our work at Neighborhood Villages directly supporting educators, and providing pathways for them to enter and improve their skills in the field, we see firsthand the challenges faced and the impact that investments and structural supports can have within the sector

Making the field of early education a more desirable profession is key to ensuring access and quality in care.

As you know, we are in a workforce crisis. Solving this means retaining quality teachers while attracting more to the field. This is necessary to create more spots for children and make certain that every child has access to quality early education.

However, staffing to the appropriate child: teacher levels is crucial for quality and safety. This is expensive and – to date – the cost has borne by families through high tuition fees and by teachers through their low wages. This cannot continue.

While investments by this legislator have had an important impact on salaries over the last 3 years, the reality remains that teachers can still make more working at McDonalds. ECE programs lose many highly qualified teachers to K-12 systems due to the notably better salary, benefits, and career opportunities. Many educators in the field often qualify for assistance programs due to their low salaries.

These bills provide a clear opportunity to enhance the structure of early education and care in Massachusetts, making early education more affordable for more families and boosting salaries and benefits for early educators.

Specifically, the provisions in this bill which make operational grants permanent, create a career ladder for educator salaries, and improve educator benefits through loan forgiveness and codifying the scholarship program are all critical steps to better the current conditions and future desirability of this field for educators thereby improving quality and access for children.

Early education is a public good and must be treated as such.

Thank you for your consideration of my testimony. I ask that you report **H.489 and S.301** out of committee favorably.