

AFFORDABLE AND ACCESSIBLE HIGH QUALITY EARLY EDUCATION AND CARE ACT (S.2697)

This legislative session, Massachusetts is in a position to make a transformative investment in the Commonwealth's early education and care system through passage of *An Act Ensuring Affordability, Readiness and Learning for our Youth and Driving Economic Development* (S.2697). This bill would make high-quality early education and care more affordable and accessible for families in the Commonwealth and make long-overdue investments in raising the salaries of early educators.

HOW THE BILL IMPACTS FAMILIES

- This bill makes care more affordable for more families by expanding access to reduced-price childcare through the Massachusetts child care financial assistance program (CCFA). [1]
- This bill permanently makes care free for families with incomes under the federal poverty line.
- This bill directs the Department of Early Education and Care to regularly update the sliding parent fee scale for families receiving state financial assistance for child care at least every 5 years and limiting fees to 7% of family income.
- This bill makes direct-to-provider operations grants permanent. This program has been critical for ensuring that programs stay open and are able to raise teacher salaries without significant increases in tuition to families. [2]

HOW THIS BILL IMPACTS TEACHERS

- This bill makes direct-to-provider operations grants permanent. Operations grants have been the key mechanism for raising teacher salaries over the past 3 years of program implementation.
- This bill makes permanent a scholarship program for early education educators, which can be used to cover the cost of tuition, fees, related child care expenses, and other supports needed to successfully participate in programs granting associate or bachelor's degrees. The amount of each scholarship must be sufficient to cover the full cost of tuition and associated fees for one semester of classes at a Massachusetts community college.
- This bill establishes a loan forgiveness program for all early educators in Massachusetts, with preference for those working in communities predominantly serving high-needs children or in areas with a shortage of child care slots.
- This bill directs the Department of Early Education and Care to develop an early education and care career ladder including: minimum salaries and compensation for each level of the career ladder that match the salaries of public school teachers with similar experience and skills, linking experience and skills to increased compensation and benefits for early education teachers, including health insurance, retirement benefits, paid vacation, and other leave time.



HOW THIS BILL IMPACTS PROVIDERS

- This bill requires reimbursement for child care subsidies to be based on quarterly enrollment rather than on daily attendance of state-subsidized children. This critical policy change will provide greater financial stability to early education and care programs participating in the Massachusetts child care financial assistance program and reduce administrative burden.
- This bill directs the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care to update the child care financial assistance reimbursement rate structure to accurately reflect the true cost of providing high-quality early education and care to lower-income and other at-risk children.
- This bill makes the direct-to-provider operations grant program permanent and updates the funding formula. This program, known as C3, provides a significant boost in funding and a simplified funding structure that has kept programs running and started to close the funding gap.
- This bill directs the Department of Early Education and Care to develop an early education and care career ladder, which should include: linking experience and skills to increased compensation; minimum salaries and compensation for each level of the career ladder that match the salaries of public school teachers with similar experience and skills; and benefits for provider staff, including health insurance, retirement benefits, paid vacation, and other leave time.

HOW THIS BILL IMPACTS EMPLOYERS

- This bill includes a private-public partnership program to support employer provided childcare
- Passing this bill would help the economy to function by increasing access to reliable, quality care-ensuring parents of young children can go to work.
- Massachusetts is consistently the least affordable state for child care. [3] This bill makes child care more affordable, meaning more families can afford to live and work in the Commonwealth and attracting more highly qualified workers to Massachusetts.

Learn More:



1. Under S.2697 eligibility for CCFA will be extend to families earning up to 85% of the Massachusetts state median income (\$104,000 for a family of 3; \$124,000 for a family of 4) and potentially to families earning up to 125% SMI. Fees to families will be limited to 7% of household income for child care. Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care January 2024 Board Meeting Slides <https://www.mass.gov/doc/january-board-meeting-slides/download>
2. Massachusetts is consistently the least affordable state for child care in the continental United States: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/wb/topics/childcare/price-by-age-care-setting>
3. Massachusetts is consistently the least affordable state for child care in the continental United States: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/wb/topics/childcare/price-by-age-care-setting>