In non-pandemic times, more than 70 percent of U.S. mothers worked. During the beginning of the pandemic, about 45 percent of mothers of school-age children were not actively working. In 2021, there was a 6.5% decline (1.6 million) in the number of mothers working, compared to a year prior. A McKinsey report, "Women in the Workplace 2021," found that burnout among women has persisted and escalated over the past year, largely due to child care breakdowns. This has led to a third of women considering leaving work altogether or looking for a job with fewer responsibilities, the consequences of which include the inability to advance to leadership roles. Fewer women working means fewer women in positions of leadership.

The high cost of child care - and the inability to access it - has forced millions of mothers out of the workforce, especially in the last two years.

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Fewer women working means losing ground in the fight for economic, social, and political equity.

- Fewer women in the workforce and fewer women in leadership positions - in the public and private sectors - hinders efforts to achieve workforce policies, such as pay equity and paid family medical leave, that support women's advancement and their opportunity to maximize employment and earnings opportunities. Wage gap, paid leave, and child care hurdles also contribute to unequal representation in elected office, which in turn undermines efforts to enact legislation that would tear down such barriers.
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.605/S.362)

- Ensures that all families of all incomes are able to equitably access affordable, high-quality care, making it more likely that mothers stay in the workforce.
  - Families with household income below 50 percent of statewide median income (SMI) would be able to access early education and child care options for free; in Massachusetts this would impact families with income of less than approximately $65,500. Above $65,500, a sliding fee scale would apply and no family would pay more than 7 percent of their household income for care.

- Advances gender justice by committing to pay equity for early educators, who are more than 90 percent women and 40 percent women of color.
  - The Common Start legislation requires that wages and benefits for early educators be commensurate with annual pay scales for equivalent teacher positions in the public K-12 school system.

- Allocates foundational funding directly to providers, to promote program stabilization and grow early education and child care capacity.
  - The Common Start legislation provides foundational funding directly to programs - many of which are women run or women-owned - to help cover the full range of operational costs associated with high quality early education and care.
  - Early education and care programs serving lower-income families and children with special needs would be eligible to receive higher levels of foundational funding. Enhanced funding also would be available to providers offering non-traditional hours of care and to those providing care in underserved communities, to encourage growing care capacity, especially in communities currently considered child care deserts.

- Supports the professional development of early education and care professionals and advances access to higher education.
  - Under the Common Start legislation, educators would have financially supported access to scholarships, loan forgiveness, and other financial aid to achieve educational and professional goals.