



# An Act to Expand Access to High-Quality, Affordable Early Education and Care

Reported out of the Massachusetts Joint Committee on Education, *An Act to Expand Access to High-Quality, Affordable Early Education and Care* ([H.4795/S.2883](#)) seeks to address current access, affordability, and workforce challenges in Massachusetts' early education and care sector. The bill:

## MAKES CRITICAL INVESTMENTS IN STABILIZING MASSACHUSETTS' EARLY EDUCATION AND CARE SECTOR AND GROWING ITS CAPACITY

- *An Act to Expand Access to High-Quality, Affordable Early Education and Care* provides greater financial stability to early education and care programs participating in the Massachusetts subsidy system by mandating that **child care subsidy reimbursement is to be based on quarterly enrollment rather than on daily attendance** of state-subsidized children.
- The bill directs the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care to **update the state's subsidy rate structure, such that it accurately reflects the true cost of providing high-quality early education and care** to lower-income and other at-risk children.
- *An Act to Expand Access to High-Quality, Affordable Early Education and Care* **permanently authorizes a direct-to-provider operations grant program**. To be eligible for direct-to-provider grant funds, a provider must enroll or be willing to enroll children with subsidies, provided that a family chooses the provider and the provider has an available opening. Providers must also comply with any recommended salaries or compensation requirements advised by the Department of Early Education and Care; comply with any contractual requirements set forth by the Department; and report required data to the Department.

## MAKES EARLY EDUCATION AND CARE MORE AFFORDABLE FOR MORE MASSACHUSETTS FAMILIES

- *An Act to Expand Access to High-Quality, Affordable Early Education and Care* raises the income eligibility threshold for the state's early education and care subsidy program. Under the bill, families with household incomes at or below 85% of the Massachusetts state median income (SMI) are now eligible for state subsidies. (The availability of such subsidies, however, is contingent upon state appropriation of funds.) With respect to accessing a subsidy, families with incomes at or below 50% of the Massachusetts SMI would have first priority; second priority would be for families with incomes at or below 85% SMI. (For a family of four, 50% of MA SMI is \$65,626 per year; 85% SMI is \$111,564 per year.)
- The bill also authorizes making subsidies available to more families, if additional funding is provided by the federal government. Should sufficient federal and state appropriations allow, the bill authorizes increasing the subsidy income eligibility threshold in phases, up to a cap of 125% SMI. (All families in the first and second priority groups (noted above) must be served before additional families become eligible.) The additional prioritization stages, which are subject to appropriation, are as follows:
  - 3rd priority: 85-100% SMI. (For a family of four, 100% SMI is approximately \$131,252.)
  - 4th priority: 101-110% SMI (For a family of four, 110% SMI is approximately \$144,377.)
  - 5th priority: 111-125% SMI (For a family of four, 125% SMI is approximately \$164,065.)

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## MAKES EARLY EDUCATION AND CARE MORE AFFORDABLE FOR MORE MASSACHUSETTS FAMILIES (CONT'D)

- *An Act to Expand Access to High-Quality, Affordable Early Education and Care* directs the Department of Early Education and Care to create a schedule for updating the sliding parent fee scale for state-subsidized families at least every 5 years. The fee scale must reflect affordability standards for participating families. (Affordability standards are not defined in the legislation.)
- The bill specifies that families participating in education and training through the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) program will receive subsidies.
- *An Act to Expand Access to High-Quality, Affordable Early Education and Care* further directs the Department of Early Education and Care to assess the extent of current early education and care supply and the unmet needs of families eligible for subsidies.

## INVESTS IN THE EARLY EDUCATION AND CARE WORKFORCE AND EDUCATOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- *An Act to Expand Access to High-Quality, Affordable Early Education and Care* establishes a scholarship program for early education and care educators. The amount of each scholarship shall, at a minimum, be sufficient to cover the full cost of tuition and associated fees for one semester of classes at a Massachusetts community college. The bill also establishes a loan forgiveness program for 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.
- The bill makes permanent an exemption to the Commonwealth's price limitation regulations, to allow programs to provide discounted tuition for the children of staff members.
- *An Act to Expand Access to High-Quality, Affordable Early Education and Care* directs the Department of Early Education and Care to develop an early education and care career ladder, including recommendations for: 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.

## CALLS FOR INQUIRY INTO HOW EMPLOYERS SHOULD CONTRIBUTE TO ENHANCED ACCESS TO EARLY EDUCATION AND CARE

- *An Act to Expand Access to High-Quality, Affordable Early Education and Care* directs the the Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development to develop recommendations for how employers of a certain size could be required to provide a childcare benefit.



FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

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