



Massachusetts' 2021-2022 Legislative Session: What Did it Deliver for Early Education and Care?

The most recent legislative session in Massachusetts came to a close on July 31, 2022. Between the beginning of the session, in January 2021, and its end, **the Massachusetts Legislature considered some of the most substantial pieces of early education and care legislation that have been introduced in the last decade**, stood up a special [Economic Review Commission](#) to evaluate immediate and long-term needs for public investment in early education and care, and introduced new vehicles and revenue streams for financing the sector, all while weathering a global pandemic and its devastation of the state's child care capacity.

Here's what the 2021-2022 Massachusetts legislative session delivered for early education and care:

Appropriations and Funding

Federal Stimulus Appropriations (Fiscal Years 2022 and 2023). In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the federal government passed large financial stimulus bills; included in these bills was funding specifically for the early education and care sector. These bills included:

- **The Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSA)**, signed into law in December of 2020, included \$131 million for early education and child care in Massachusetts. These funds supported operational grants for early education and care providers, through a program called [Commonwealth Cares for Children \(C3\)](#). The C3 grants helped to stabilize the early education and care providers and prevent program closures.
- **The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)**, signed into law in March of 2021, resulted in \$5.3 billion for Massachusetts, including \$510 million specifically allocated to early education and care. Of those funds, \$314 million was used to fund the C3 grant program; remaining state ARPA funds for early education and care await appropriation by the Massachusetts Legislature.

State Annual Budget Appropriations (Fiscal Year 2023), was signed into law on July 28, 2022. The FY23 budget includes historic investments totaling nearly \$1.2 billion for early education and care, which will go toward – among other programs – educator wages, operational grants for early education and care providers, and funding that allows Neighborhood Villages to continue to carry out its mission. Some highlights include:

- More than \$12 million to the Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) for innovation and family navigation support
- \$250 million for provider stabilization grants
- \$60 million rate reserve for increased educator salaries
- \$10 million for Higher Education Opportunities for early childhood educators
- \$1 million for Neighborhood Villages

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Legislation to Improve Access to Early Education and Care

In the 2021-2022 session, the Massachusetts Legislature considered multiple substantive bills that focused solely on early education and care, as well as one additional bill that had a broader focus on economic development but included significant funds for early education and care. Ultimately, however, none of these bills became law before the close of the formal session. These bills are:

- **Common Start Legislation**(1) - Introduced in February of 2021, the Common Start legislation (originally, [H.605/S.362](#)) established a framework for a system of affordable, high-quality early education and child care for all Massachusetts families. The bill, which contemplated a five-year phase-in, included expanded family eligibility for child care subsidies; access to wraparound services for children; public investment in providers; and higher salaries as well as expanded professional development for educators. While the Common Start bill was not considered by the full Legislature, the Legislature repurposed the bill and used it as the basis for [new draft legislation](#) (described below) that aimed to accomplish similar goals.
- **An Act to Expand Access to High-Quality, Affordable Early Education and Care** ([H.4795/S.2997](#)) - Reported out of the Joint Committee on Education in May 2022, this new bill sought (1) to address main principles established in the Common Start legislation, such as access and affordability, and (2) to reflect recommendations made by the Legislature's special [Economic Review Commission](#) regarding priority public investments in the state's early education and care sector. The bill would - among other provisions - make the state's [Commonwealth Cares for Children \(C3\)](#) stabilization grant program permanent, update the state's child care subsidy rate structure, and expand families' access to child care subsidies. The bill is not associated with dedicated funding. The bill was passed unanimously by the Massachusetts Senate in July 2022 but was not considered by the full Massachusetts House of Representatives. It is expected that the bill may be reintroduced in the next legislative session.
- **Economic Development Package.** At the end of the legislative session, [a comprehensive economic development bill](#) ("An Act relating to economic growth and relief for the commonwealth") remained in the final stages of negotiations. Proposals for early education and care included in the bill amounted to an additional \$150 million for the C3 stabilization grant program, as well as an estimated \$200 million from revenue generated by an iLottery program for placement in a trust fund.

Looking Ahead

Given legislative movement on the vision of Common Start, as well as the recommendations enumerated in the Economic Review Commission's report, and the significant investments in early education and care made by the FY2023 budget, it is anticipated that the legislative session that begins in January 2023 will continue to advance policy aimed at improving access to high-quality, affordable early education and care. In addition, given the renewed visibility of how early education and care directly propels the Commonwealth's economic prosperity, Neighborhood Villages is optimistic that the 2021-2022 session will have laid the foundation for ongoing prioritization of early education and care in sessions to follow.

(1) Official name: *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*