



May 7, 2020

Dear Reopening Advisory Board:

Thank you for all you are doing for the Commonwealth. As you develop recommendations for how best to re-boot economic recovery in Massachusetts, we ask that you include an intentional focus on reopening and strengthening the child care sector. **No recovery will be successful if employees and working families do not have access to safe, affordable, high-quality child care for their children.**

The importance of child care as a critical enabler for economic recovery and growth has been acknowledged by leading business groups and influencers including the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, the Massachusetts Business Roundtable, the Massachusetts Competitive Partnership, the Massachusetts High Technology Council, the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce, and the Boston Business Journal. At the national level supporters of child care include the Business Roundtable, U.S. Chamber of Commerce, American Enterprise Institute, FEMA, and the CDC.

Within Massachusetts, these organizations and the businesses they represent understand that before COVID-19, 74% of children under six lived in households in which all adults worked full time.<sup>1</sup> However, the social distancing efforts necessary to mitigate the public health crisis have disrupted the critical child care market that made this employment possible. Now, while more than 500 of our 8,193 child care providers have opened Exempt Emergency Child Care Programs for the children of essential workforces, these providers only represent a small fraction of the pre-COVID-19 statewide capacity.<sup>2</sup>

As the Commonwealth goes “back to work,” employers are reimagining both what the workplace will look like and what the employee experience will be. Child care – early education and school-age programming – will also be dramatically different. For example, phased and limited approaches to standard working hours and revised approaches to public transportation for employees and working families will necessitate child care policy and funding for non-standard hours of care. Social distancing requirements set by public health officials will impact enrollment thresholds, resulting in significantly reduced capacity and higher operating costs. Without a focused and intentional plan for how child care providers can support back-to-work policies and guidelines, employee productivity and broader economic recovery will be in jeopardy.

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<sup>1</sup> 435,331 children 0-5 in Massachusetts. Whitebook, M., McLean, C., Austin, L.J.E., & Edwards, B. (2018). Early Childhood Workforce Index 2018: MASSACHUSETTS. Center for the Study of Child Care Employment. <https://cscce.berkeley.edu/files/2018/06/2018-Index-Massachusetts.pdf>; There are one million children 0-12 in Massachusetts, and capacity to serve only 25% of them in licensed child care (Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care).

<sup>2</sup> There are 2,862 child care centers and 5,331 family child care homes in Massachusetts, which serve children from birth through school-age. Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care, April 2020.

A McKinsey & Company article, “From surviving to thriving: Reimagining the post-COVID-19 return,” calls on business leaders to “rethink their organizations,” by considering how they can operate effectively in the face of COVID-19. While McKinsey analysts highlight the need for matching the right talent to the most critical challenges, they caution that this approach will only work if the talent is present in the first place.<sup>3</sup> Talented employees can’t be present if they don’t have child care. Employee absences and turnover resulting from lack of consistent child care can cost employers and impact overall economic development by reducing productivity and constricting the labor market.

Employees are incredibly worried too. A recent Strategies for Children survey “Family Perspective: Child Care in Massachusetts” has had 1,550 parent responses to-date.<sup>4</sup> Among the responses:

- 60% of parents responding are struggling to work from home without child care.
- 46% say they will not be able to return to work without a consistent child care solution.
- **A resounding 87% say that they would be hesitant to return to child care due to health concerns.**
- While close to 70% hope to return to their pre-COVID-19 child care arrangements, there is no guarantee that those programs will be able to re-open, or have the capacity to welcome all families back.

**The Commonwealth’s economy cannot be re-opened if Massachusetts employees and working families are unable to return to work or re-open their businesses because they cannot find and feel confident that they have safe, affordable and reliable care for their children.**

We therefore ask that a child care provider/representative is added to the Reopening Advisory Board. If this is not possible, form a sub-committee focused on child care (early education, after school, summer enrichment/camp) since this has become such an important area of concern.

We also ask that the recommendations being released by the Reopening Advisory Board on May 18 include the following input submitted by the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care in four areas:

**Health & Safety:** Develop provider criteria and unambiguous protocols aligned with public health data with clear pathways for ensuring adherence to requirements; create systems for procuring and distributing materials (i.e. PPE); and create mechanisms for communicating new expectations and procedures to families.

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<sup>3</sup> Sneider, K. and Sternfels, B. (May 2020). From surviving to thriving: Reimagining the post-COVID-19 return. McKinsey & Company. <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work/from-surviving-to-thriving-reimagining-the-post-covid-19-return>

<sup>4</sup> Strategies for Children. (May 1, 2020). Family Perspective COVID-19 Survey. [http://www.strategiesforchildren.org/COVID-19/COVID19\\_FamilySurvey.pdf](http://www.strategiesforchildren.org/COVID-19/COVID19_FamilySurvey.pdf)

**Community Recovery:** Align the phases of re-opening with the state's priorities on restarting businesses and ensuring that providers have the appropriate resources to support families, including mental and behavioral health supports.

**Workforce:** Streamline systems to ensure providers can quickly re-hire staff, including clearing necessary background checks and certifications, and provide the incentives for recruiting and retaining qualified staff who have been furloughed or laid off.

**Financing:** Identify a financing system for the market that moves away from the need for providers to reach full-enrollment to viably operate. This will be crucial given the disruptions to programs' enrollment that are likely to occur as the public health picture unfolds. A new financing system should also acknowledge the start-up costs programs will have, and the system should create easy pathways for low-income families to access child care subsidies.

Strong collaboration between employers, employees, and child care providers is essential for economic recovery. Such alignment should be informed by feedback mechanisms to understand and leverage child care demand and parent considerations so that Massachusetts can effectively and efficiently restart its economy.

For more information contact Amy O'Leary, Early Education for All Campaign Director, [aoleary@strategiesforchildren.org](mailto:aoleary@strategiesforchildren.org)

Thank you for your leadership.



Acre Family Child Care  
Alliance of Massachusetts YMCAs  
Ayer Kiddie Depot  
Boston Opportunity Agenda  
Boston Women Leaders Network  
Clarendon Early Education Services, Inc.  
Coalition for Social Justice  
Commonwealth Children's Fund  
Eastern Bank  
Edward Street Child Services  
Horizons for Homeless Children  
Jumpstart  
King's Corner Learning Center  
Massachusetts Afterschool Partnership  
Massachusetts Alliance of Boys and Girls Clubs  
Massachusetts Association for Community Action (MASSCAP)  
Massachusetts Association for the Education of Young Children (MAAEYC)  
Massachusetts Association of Early Education and Care (MADCA)  
Massachusetts Business Roundtable  
Massachusetts Child Care Resource and Referral  
Massachusetts Head Start Association  
Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition (MIRA)  
Neighborhood Villages  
Nurtury  
PNC Bank  
Roca Inc.  
SEIU Local 509  
Springfield Partners for Community Action  
Strategies for Children  
Teach Plus  
The Boston Foundation  
The Care Institute  
The Community Group  
The Kathy Reticker Forum  
The Village Common Children's Center  
United Way of Massachusetts Bay & Merrimack Valley  
Wellesley Centers for Women  
Wonderful World of Children