Massachusetts families need access to affordable child care and preschool to support working parents and to ensure that children start kindergarten ready to learn. During the first five years of life, children learn critical skills such as language and socio-emotional regulation, which provide a foundation for lifelong learning. High-quality preschool and child care can support healthy development and enable parents to work. Unfortunately, too many children are left behind by the status quo. In fact, differences in children’s cognitive abilities by income are evident at only 9 months old and significantly widen by the time children are age 2. Early learning has positive impacts for children, families, and the economy. It’s time to work to put these programs within reach.

Massachusetts families need access to high-quality child care and preschool

Massachusetts has 410,089 children under age 6, 70 percent of whom have all available parents in the workforce.

High-quality child care and preschool programs help narrow school readiness gaps, which is particularly important for children of color and those living in low-income families. Thirty-four percent of Massachusetts children under age 6 live in low-income families.

The supply of high-quality child care is limited. Many states have implemented quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS) to assess and support quality in early care and education programs. Currently, 59 percent of Massachusetts child care centers participate in QRIS.

The cost of child care is out of reach for families

Annual costs at a child care center in Massachusetts average $29,878 for an infant and a 4-year-old, which is 32 percent of the median income for families with children.

For low-income families and people of color, the average cost of child care would constitute the majority of income in most cases.
The current child care system is failing Massachusetts families
On average, the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) serves only 7 percent of federally eligible children in Massachusetts.14 This results in only 29,500 Massachusetts children served through CCDBG funds.15 Of those served, 73 percent attend licensed or regulated center-based care.16

Massachusetts families need greater access to high-quality preschool programs
Massachusetts has a Universal Pre-Kindergarten initiative that serves children from the age of 2 years, 9 months all the way through kindergarten entry. Full-year, full-day services are offered at various public schools, private child care centers, Head Start programs, and faith-based centers.17 This preschool program meets, on average, 7 quality benchmarks set by the National Institute for Early Education Research and spends $3,309 annually per student.18

In Massachusetts, 12 percent19 of 3-year-olds and 12 percent of 4-year-olds are enrolled in a public preschool program.20

Investing in high-quality early learning programs affects economies
Making child care more affordable for families can increase mothers’ workforce participation, resulting in a boost to the state’s economy.21

In Massachusetts, if child care costs did not exceed more than 10 percent of a family’s income, the state's economy would increase nearly $70.75 million.22

We can do better for Massachusetts families
The Center for American Progress proposes two solutions to put high-quality child care and preschool within reach for Massachusetts families and create an early childhood learning continuum for children:

• If child care costs are capped at 10 percent of a family’s income, Massachusetts families would save $7,882 a year.23
• Voluntary universal preschool for all 3- and 4-year-olds.24 This would increase access for 126,400 children in Massachusetts.25

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cost of child care as a share of income for people of color22</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American Indian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian and Pacific Islander</td>
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<tr>
<td>African American</td>
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<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cost of child care as a share of income for low-income families13</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100 percent of the federal poverty level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>150 percent of the federal poverty level</td>
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<tr>
<td>200 percent of the federal poverty level</td>
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</tbody>
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Endnotes


8 Note: IL, NH, and OK require participation in QRIS or it’s required by licensing standards, and therefore participation is listed as 100 percent. FL has three regional QRIS with available data: MD is Miami-Dade County, PB is Palm Beach County, and D is Duval County.


18 Ibid.

19 Note: In states that do not serve 3-year-olds or with no state-funded preschool program, enrollment rates include federal Head Start only.


22 Ibid.

23 Author’s analysis based on data from Child Care Aware of America, “Parents and the High Cost of Child Care” and the 2015 U.S. median income as measured by Kids Count Data Center. See Kids Count Data Center, “Median Family Income Among Households With Children.”
