



CHILD CARE IS GENDER JUSTICE

In Massachusetts, and nationally, our nation's broken child care system underscores the undervaluing of women and their work and directly drives gender disparities in workforce participation, compensation, and representation in leadership. Structural sexism permeates the early education and care system and is most acutely felt by women of color. Failure to publicly invest in a comprehensive child care system has long kept women out of the labor force or unable to optimize their employment and earnings potential - outcomes that fuel economic, social, and political inequities for women.

MASSACHUSETTS IS IN A POSITION TO ADVANCE WOMEN'S EQUITY AND ADDRESS GENDER DISPARITIES IN THE WORKPLACE THROUGH PASSAGE OF TWO BILLS: "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" ([HD.2794/SD.667](#)).

In 2023, the Massachusetts House of Representatives and the Massachusetts Senate introduced respective pieces of legislation to address Massachusetts' child care crisis: each named 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 (HD. 2794 and SD.667). Both of these bills, which bear the same name but differ from each other in certain ways, would make high-quality early education and care affordable and accessible for more families in the Commonwealth and make long-overdue investments in raising the salaries of early educators. Passage of the bills "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" (HD.2794/SD.667) is a critical step toward achieving greater gender equity in Massachusetts.

Why We Need Immediate Passage of the Bills "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" (HD.2794/SD.667).

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.

- While the labor market overall has seen a rebound since the losses during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the percentage of mothers working, [especially those with children under 5 years old](#), has yet to recover.
- A recent report from the [Center for American Progress](#) also finds that women's wages plateau mid-career when many take on additional caregiving duties compared to men.

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

- A [McKinsey report](#), Women in the Workplace 2022, found that burnout among women has persisted and escalated over the past two years, largely due to child care breakdowns. 40 percent of mothers with children under 10 report considering leaving work altogether or looking for a job with fewer responsibilities, and the majority cite child care responsibilities as the primary reason.
- Fewer women in the workforce and fewer women in leadership positions 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.

Details on the Affordable and Accessible High Quality Early Education and Care bills:

Both versions of *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*:

- **Ensure that more families, especially those in highest need, are able to equitably access affordable, high-quality care, making it more likely that mothers stay in the workforce.**
 - [HD.2794](#): Families with incomes below 125 percent of State Median Income (SMI), which is \$140,000 annually for a family of 3, would have access to reduced-price care.
 - [SD.667](#): Families with incomes below 200 percent of SMI, which is \$220,000 annually for a family of 3, would have access to reduced-price care.
 - Both HD.2794 and SD.667 seek to reduce financial barriers to early educators' ability to enroll their children in 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.**
 - Both HD.2794 and SD.667 require that wages and benefits for early educators be aligned with annual pay scales for equivalent teacher positions in the public K-12 school system.
- **Allocate foundational funding directly to providers, to improve access to early education and care and promote increased compensation.**
 - HD.2794 and SD.667 both provide foundational funding directly to providers-many of which are women run or women-owned- to help cover the full range of operational costs associated with provision of high-quality early education and care. Direct-to-provider funding has been shown to have a direct impact on programs' ability to raise salaries for their workforce.

- 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 care in underserved communities, to encourage growing the supply of child care providers, especially in communities currently considered child care deserts.
- **Support the professional development of early education and care professionals and advances access to higher education.**
 - Under HD.2794 and SD.667, early educators would have access to financial supports for advancing their education attainment and achieve their professional goals, including scholarships, loan forgiveness, and other financial aid.