



The
Bessie Tartt Wilson
Initiative for Children INC.
research. engage. change.

Trustees

September 16, 2015

Atul Varma
Chairman
BNY Mellon

Senator Sonia Chang-Diaz
State House, Room 111
Boston, MA 02133

Dawn Perry, Esq.
Vice Chair
Ahold USA, Inc.

Representative Alice Peisch
State House, Room 473G
Boston, MA 02133

George M. Coulter
Treasurer
*CBIZ Tofias & Mayer
Hoffman McCann P.C.*

Jed Swan
Clerk
Drydock Ventures

Dear Chairs Chang-Diaz and Peisch:

Bridget Akinc
Great Teaching Network

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony regarding the early education and care-related bills currently before you. The Bessie Tartt Wilson Initiative for Children seeks to highlight the importance of a birth-to-career education pipeline. The majority of the bills before you are focused on Pre-K, with the exception of S266/H336 which impacts the entire continuum. Pre-K for four-year olds is a critical component of that continuum. We encourage you to adopt the legislative framework articulated in S266/H336, *An Act to Improve Educational Outcomes for Children in the Commonwealth from Birth Through School-Age*.

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Marie St. Fleur
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Gail L. Kirk
Trustee Emeritus

The Bessie Tartt Wilson Initiative for Children leads the *Put Massachusetts Kids First* coalition (www.putmakidsfirst.org), a broad-based coalition of over forty-five organizations across the Commonwealth focused on supporting quality in early education and care and out-of-school time programs. The coalition's interests are aligned with the statutory responsibilities of the Department of Early Education and Care in overseeing the birth-through-school-age continuum of care which nurtures and educates young children in a variety of public and private settings. Pre-K is a piece of that continuum.

Having children prepared for a lifetime of learning requires consistent, skilled and fairly paid educators. The median salary of a center-based educator in Massachusetts is between \$22,501 and \$25,000 and the workforce turnover rate is nearly 30 percent in early learning and out-of-school programs. Highly-skilled educators are therefore difficult to recruit and retain. Thanks to the work of the DEEC and significant ground work executed by the field over the past 10 years, Massachusetts was awarded one of the thirteen national Pre-K expansion grants. This award of \$60 million over four years, with \$15 million authorized for FY16, allows Massachusetts to delve deeper into the Pre-K expansion path that it has persistently embraced over the past 10 years. As you know the grant enables the following: 1) promotes the establishment of a true private public partnership through the coordination of a mixed-delivery system 2) supports the Department in implementing the quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) 3) promotes evidence-based curriculum and 4) provides

comparable educator salaries. This federal investment provides a sound platform for identifying best practices to populate the early education system and bring Pre-K up to scale.

Consequently, this federal investment allows the Massachusetts legislature to look at other pertinent factors. It now has the opportunity to explore how to mitigate the possible unintended consequences of this otherwise positive expansion such as:

- The draining of degreed educators from community-based settings to public school settings, which is good news for public school students but harmful to four-year olds and infants and toddlers who rely on community programs.
- The growing shortage of early educators to support future expansion of Pre-K and along the birth-through-school-age continuum. Educator turnover rate is close to 30% and many programs are having difficulty recruiting and retaining educators.
- The lack of capacity of the Department of Early Education and Care to carry out its statutory mandate.

Since 2001, funding for community-based early education and care and out-of-school time programs has not kept pace with inflation, resulting in a reduction of more than \$100 million – a 50% decrease in the state's commitment to its youngest scholars. We are very appreciative that the legislature heard our cry last fiscal year, investing \$5M in salary reserves to help stabilize the field and \$4M for quality investments.

Community-based early education and out-of-school programs are an essential component of the education pipeline. For close to a century, they have been the silent, underappreciated partner in a public-private partnership. They have quietly supported the healthy development of our youngest learners without proper recognition or fiscal support. Their contributions are not nice extras, nor optional. They have much to teach the public school system and much to learn from the public school system as well. Many parents in communities throughout this state rely on their professionalism and flexibility from 7:00AM to 6:00PM, allowing parents from Wellesley to Pittsfield to show up at their place of employment and our children to show up in kindergarten ready to learn. Many of us are the products of such interventions. Let's work together. A true partnership between the community-based early education and care providers and the public schools is essential to Pre-K as well as to the birth-through-school-age continuum as a whole.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. I am happy to be part of any Pre-K initiative or omnibus bill that takes into consideration the birth-to-school-age continuum.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Marie St. Fleur".

Marie St. Fleur
President and CEO