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**Bessie Tartt Wilson**  
Initiative for Children INC.  
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January 15, 2016

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Department of Early Education and Care  
51 Sleeper Street, 4th Floor  
Boston, MA 02210

Dear Tom,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony regarding the Massachusetts Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) FY16-FY18 state plan. The federal reauthorization of CCDF in 2014 and our state's submission of the upcoming plan provides the Commonwealth a significant opportunity to realize its commitment to building high-quality early education and care system for its youngest learners.

The Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) Act of 2014 strongly encourages states to commit to true public-private partnerships and coordinate services so that children receive full-day, consistent care.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, it requires Massachusetts to provide stable, quality early education and care to a diverse demographic of children. It is within the context of these goals that we request your consideration of the following comments.

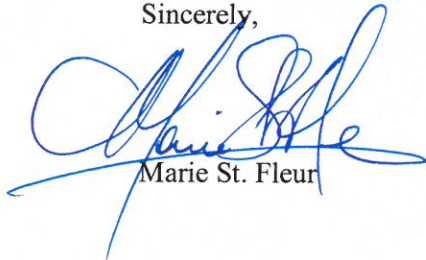
The Bessie Tartt Wilson Initiative for Children is most concerned about the quality of early education and care for underserved children throughout our Commonwealth. The number of early education and care programs in this state has declined, from 11,824 in 2011 to 8,954 in 2015.<sup>2</sup> Subsidy reimbursement rates in Massachusetts have remained substantially below the federal guideline of the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile.<sup>3</sup> Rates have not kept up with inflation, which perpetuates poverty-level wages for early education and care staff. Because of this, the field is experiencing a crisis. The low reimbursement rates make it difficult to run programs and for programs to recruit and retain skilled educators. Educators are so poorly paid that 37% of them are on some form of public assistance.<sup>4</sup> If we do not act expeditiously, the quality achieved thus far will be fleeting because the key ingredients for quality – educators – are turning over at a rate of about 30% annually.<sup>5</sup> The Board and Department of Early Education and Care has the power to change this trajectory by implementing the following strategies in the CCDF plan

1. **The Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) has, within its purview, the ability to set base reimbursement rates at a higher level without legislative intervention.** Massachusetts must reinforce its commitment to quality by raising reimbursement rates. We urge the state to set base rates at the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile as a stepping stone to reaching the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile.
2. **We strongly support the new CCDF provision of guaranteeing continuity of care for children for a minimum of 12 months.** Children benefit the most from consistent, highly-skilled educators and stable environments. As Bessie Tartt Wilson Initiative for Children demonstrated in its 2006 study, *keeping the Promise: A Study of the Massachusetts Child Care Vouchers System*, short-term vouchers cause significant disruptions for children and their families. We urge Massachusetts to implement this new provision swiftly and with fidelity.

3. **We also urge the state to revisit sections 2.2.10 and 6.1.9 of the draft state plan which refers to the availability of materials and resources for families and providers for whom English is not their first language.** EEC must be intentional about building an inclusive system where diversity is respected and information is accessible to parents so that they can best support their children's development.

In summary, we urge you to realize your commitment to quality by raising base subsidy reimbursement rates, guaranteeing the continuity of care, and ensuring the accessibility to information for individuals with limited English proficiency. We look forward to working with you in the years ahead. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Marie St. Fleur

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<sup>1</sup> Child Care and Development Block Grant Act of 2014, Section 658E, C.2.O and C.2.P

<sup>2</sup> Child Care Aware State Fact Sheets. Data from state Resource and Referral Agencies for Child Care Aware's yearly MA state survey. <http://usa.childcareaware.org/advocacy-public-policy/resources/reports-and-research/child-care-in-america-2015-state-fact-sheet/>

<sup>3</sup> Department of Early Education and Care. *Commonwealth of Massachusetts 2015 Child Care Market Rate Survey*. Public Consulting Group, June 2015.

<sup>4</sup> Whitebook, M, Phillips D, and Howes C. *Worthy Work, Still Unlivable Wages: The Early Childhood Workforce 25 Years after the National Child Care Staffing Study*. Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley, 2014.

<sup>5</sup> Marshall N, et all. *Massachusetts Capacity Study Research Brief: Characteristics of the Current Early Education and Care Workforce Serving 3 – 5 year olds*. Center for Research on Women, Wellesley College, 2005.