



THE MASSACHUSETTS ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT TRUST FUND

One Ashburton Place 12th Floor Boston, MA 02108 | (617) 367-3900

Economic Empowerment Trust Fund Meeting

Date: Monday December 9, 2024

Time: 10:00 AM

Location: Attendees participated remotely via Zoom platform

I. Meeting Call to Order and Roll Call

Treasurer Deborah B. Goldberg called the meeting of the Economic Empowerment Trust Fund ("EETF") to order at 10:00 AM with the following members present for all or part of the meeting:

Treasurer Deborah B. Goldberg, Chair
Roy Belson, Appointee of the State Treasurer
Todd Ostrowski, Designee of Commissioner of Elementary & Secondary Education
Tom Moreau, Designee of the Secretary of Education
Jacqueline McPherson, Designee of the Secretary of Housing & Economic Development
Britte McBride, Designee of the Undersecretary of Consumer Affairs & Business Regulation
Emily Torres-Culliane, Chief, Community Engagement Division at Office of the Attorney General Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Yvonne Spicer, Former Mayor of the City of Framingham
Charles F. Desmond, Senior Fellow at the New England Board of Higher Education
Marybeth R. Breed, Chairman, Financial Planning Association of New England (FPANE)
Evelyn Murphy, Former Lieutenant Governor of Massachusetts, Founder and President of The WAGE Project, Inc.
Representative Steven Ultrino, State Representative, 33rd Middlesex District

Absent from the meeting:

Michael A. Prisco, Appointee of the House Minority Leader
Senator Jamie Eldridge, Appointee of the Senate President

Daniel J. Ryan, Appointee of the Speaker of the House

Raichelle L. Kallery, Appointee of the Senate Minority Leader

II. Meeting Minutes
(Vote Motion)
10:07

Treasurer Goldberg called the meeting to order and announced that two new members joined the Board. Treasurer introduced Dr. Charles Desmond; she mentioned his longstanding involvement with OEE. Dr. Desmond has an extensive background with public service and is currently a senior fellow at the New England Board of Higher Education. Next, Treasurer introduced Marybeth Breed, an active partner in her current role as President and Community Outreach Director of the Financial Planners Association of New England. Treasurer Goldberg then lead the recitation of the OEE Board Oath of Office.

Treasurer Goldberg sought a motion to approve the October 10, 2024, EETF Board Meeting Minutes. On a motion by Former Lieutenant Governor Evelyn Murphy, seconded by Jacqueline Furtado McPherson, the Board voted to approve the Minutes from the meeting held on October 10, 2024.

Roll Call Vote:

Roy Belson: Yes.

Marybeth Breed: Yes.

Charles Desmond: Yes.

Jacqueline McPherson: Yes.

Tom Moreau: Yes.

Evelyn Murphy: Yes.

Britte McBride: Yes

Todd Ostrowski: Yes.

Yvonne Spicer: Yes.

Emily Torres-Cullinane Yes.

Deborah Goldberg: Yes

The motion carried – 11 in favor, 0 against.

II. Reports

10:09AM

a. Executive Director's Report

Ms. Alayna Van Tassel thanked the Treasurer and greeted the Board members. She continued on from the last meeting in October, starting with the Credit for Life fairs for the 2023-2024 grant. Fairs will be completed this Fall. She mentioned a change in the timing for the Credit for Life grant applications. They now start in the Fall and go through the following calendar year. There will be new data in March of 2025. Grant applications for the 2024-2025 round were completed in November and new grantees will be announced by the end of the calendar year.

Ms. Van Tassel stated that since it is the end of 2024, it is the start of new legislative session. Constitutional Officers filed their legislation in November and Treasurer Goldberg has filed her bills for the next legislative session. Ms. Van Tassel referenced the three bills being refiled. The first act requires financial education in schools. This legislation would require all schools in Massachusetts to offer financial education. Twenty-six states require financial education as a graduation requirement. Several neighboring states, including Rhode Island and Connecticut, have recently passed legislation to do just that.

Ms. Van Tassel referenced a second refiled bill, legislation to establish the Office of Economic Empowerment. The Office of Economic Empowerment exists; however, it is not codified into Massachusetts General Law. Lastly, an Act Establishing a Baby Bonds Program was refiled with a different name than previous years in an effort to promote clarity and transparency.

Treasurer Goldberg explained that the reason for delay with financial education bill from the legislature is due to the fact that historically, it was argued against as an unfunded mandate on local communities. This is always a strong argument that districts do not have enough time in the day, they do not have the training, and they do not have the money or resources.

The Financial Wellness Program for State Employees is officially sunseting at the end of the month. This is a program that was originally funded by NAST and supported by the Wells Fargo Foundation. The last grantee meeting was held during the week of 12/2/24 and OEE has permission from NAST to use the remaining funds for that program to support the new Enriched Portal. More information will be released on the Enriched Portal at the March meeting.

Next, Ms. Van Tassel spoke about OEE's 10-year anniversary in January. A 10-year anniversary video is being created. This video includes several program participants speaking about various OEE programs, including Worth and Wealth and BabySteps. The video will go live in January, but it will be shared during the March meeting.

In January, the Office of Economic Empowerment will be celebrating the five-year anniversary of BabySteps. Baby Steps launched in January of 2020. BabySteps enrollment has only continued to exceed expectations in the past five years. Early in 2025, OEE will be launching an enrollment hub grant program to help support the enrollment hubs that exist throughout the state.

b. BabySteps Report

Dr. Elizabeth Pierce began her overview by reviewing a slide that provided the BabySteps annual numbers. The slide displayed the number of births by year. From January through November, there had been 55,618 births reported. There had also been 26,722 checked boxes which accounts for about 46.1% of the babies born. The checked boxes refer to the number of check boxes in the Department of Public Health parent worksheets for birth certificates, indicating families' interest in BabySteps. The goal is to see this number continuing in an upward trend. The current number of accounts by birth year is 43,429. She stated that the percentage of accounts opened in contrast to the number of births. Currently BabySteps is at 13.4%.

Referring to a graph of BabySteps accounts opened by year as of December 3, 2024, Dr. Pierce showed there are 43,884 BabySteps accounts totaling \$2,194,200. That amount reflects the \$50 of seed money into each of those 43,884 accounts. There was a spike at the beginning of the year from the DTA outreach for SNAP into BabySteps.

Dr. Pierce continued the report on the BabySteps Accounts overview. The overview reflected Fidelity's most recent report of 42,769 accounts opened as of October 4th. The percentage of accounts closed, 1.3%, is the same as reported during the recent meeting in October. The percentage of accounts not contributing at all is 9.2%, which was very similar to the 9.3% reported in October. The percentage of accounts with automatic deposits of 20.1% was down less than a percentage point from the 20.9% reported at our October meeting.

Dr. Pierce noted that there is a wide distribution of customer distributions. 5.1% have made some sort of withdrawal from their accounts, up only slightly from 5.0% reported in October for a total withdrawal of \$11,169,400. Dr. Pierce elaborated that while \$11 million is a large number it in fact reflects only 1.7% of the total account balance of over \$641,960,305. That 1.7% of withdrawals of the total account balance is the same percentage reported at October's meeting.

Finally, Dr. Pierce discussed the contributions and balance, which provides a month-by-month overview of the growth in the number of accounts and growth in customer contributions as reported by Fidelity. The total customer contributions to date showed the most recently reported numbers with \$521,573,984 in total customer contributions. The total seed was \$2,138,450, again reflective of the \$50 seed for each of the 42,769 accounts reported by Fidelity. The next column over showed the total account balance of \$641,941,365. Dr. Pierce noted that that total account balance reflects contributions as well as interest. This number fluctuates, reflective of the market/

Ms. Keegan continued the presentation after thanking Dr. Pierce for the insights and added that the 529 account can be used for college, apprenticeships, vocational training as well as tuition for k-12.

Ms. Keegan discussed the SNAP into BabySteps program. The program provides families who are receiving SNAP benefits and are also enrolled in the BabySteps 529 account an additional \$120 deposit over the course of a year. Once funding concludes this month, the first family enlisted in the program will have received their first total of \$120.

Ms. Keegan stated that the program was originally intended to run for one full year. However, the outreach with the Department of Transitional Assistance was such a huge success that there is still funding left to continue receiving SNAP into BabySteps applicants. Rather than concluding the program, the program will be extended until the end of fiscal year 2025. At that time, OEE will decide on next steps for SNAP into BabySteps. Depending on the cost of outreach, OEE is planning to have DTA send out another text to their audience of SNAP families under the age of one.

Ms. Keegan continued to a slide displaying families who are receiving SNAP into BabySteps deposits. The top applied race is Black followed by Hispanic, then White families. Boston, Springfield and Worcester are the top the highest birth rates in Massachusetts with high SNAP into BabySteps numbers. Families who did complete a survey received an extra \$10 deposit into their 529 account. Response rate is relatively low, but overwhelmingly parents applying are high school graduates who save for their children's future.

November was National Adoption Month, and Massachusetts has officially recognized National Adoption Day as a holiday. OEE team members recognized the month and visited courthouses in Essex County in Salem, Worcester County in Worcester, and Plymouth County in Brockton. Adopted families also qualify for the BabySteps seed.

c. Community Ambassador Program Update

Mr. McLeish provided updates on the Community Ambassadors Program. He began by explaining the program's goal of enhancing the understanding of all OEE programs by partnering with individuals across the State who already provide existing resources and have a strong connection in providing services to their community. The goal is to increase participation and engagement in OEE's programs.

Mr. McLeish elaborated on the locations of the seven Community Ambassadors; Brockton, Chelsea/Revere, Fall River/New Bedford, Lowell, Worcester, and two in Boston. Community Ambassadors were responsible for tasks such as tabling events to promote specific or general OEE programs, signing people up for the OEE mailing list, posting materials around town

hotspots, sharing information on social media, enrolling residents in BabySteps, establishing community partner hubs and connecting residents with the Office's digital financing programming.

In total, Community Ambassadors secured over 120 newsletter sign ups, lead over 80 financial literacy workshops and tabling events, shared material with over 200 partner organizations and businesses, and presented over 50 community presentations on OEE programs. Mr. McLeish expressed his pride for the achievements of the Ambassadors, and that their work will affect the Office of Economic Empowerment's next steps for goals and programming.

Dr. Charles Desmond commented his congratulations on an impressive and successful program.

d. Grant Reports- Worth & Wealth

Ms. Jennifer Duran introduced herself and provided updates on the Worth & Wealth Seminars, a series of weekly financial education webinars sponsored by a \$40,000 grant from Citizens. Ms. Duran described some of the webinar topics, such as: budgeting, managing debt, financial planning, and retirement. Ms. Duran was excited to share that at the halfway point of the series, registrations and attendance are increasing steadily, and positive feedback continues to be shared from emails and polls. Resource emails are shared after the seminar. Resources included links to Enrich, the Financial Wellness Platform.

Worth & Wealth also included access to a session with Financial Coach, Ms. Oriana Falkowski. Ms. Falkowski shared experiences of the people she coached, which included the benefits of talking to an unbiased third party, finding next steps with their budgets, and ongoing support. Ms. Duran looked forward to presenting more detailed reporting when the program concludes.

The Worth & Wealth seminars in English conclude on January 29th. The seminars in Spanish, Valor y Dinero, launches in February of 2025. These workshops will connect to a broader audience and include workshops like homeownership and understanding credit.

e. Trust Fund Financial Report

Ms. Van Tassel and Ms. Karen Guida shared the Economic Empowerment Trust Fund (EETF) balance sheet with the board. Ms. Van Tassel provided clarity that the EETF is a separate budget than the Office of Economic Empowerment. The contents of the balance sheet had the main bank account with \$466,640.58, which included the \$300,000 transferred from the legislative appropriation. Ms. Van Tassel elaborated on the usage of these funds, which are primarily BabySteps with the addition of administrative charges. \$75,000 of the funding will be rolled over

to BabySteps once it is matched. There was \$718,017.48 in the BabySteps bank at the end of October 2024.

Ms. Van Tassel then went over the balance sheet. Due to the nature of outside-EETF funding sources for SNAP into BabySteps and BabySteps Lynn, the columns are marked at zero dollars. Ms. Van Tassel shared that there were over \$700,000 for the BabySteps starter seed. Legislative appropriations will be used on the Community Ambassadors funding to make up for previous errors. Ms. Van Tassel announced the next round of Community Ambassadors applications to be live in the spring of 2025, which will be supported by the Office of Economic Empowerment Department rather than the EETF. Ms. Van Tassel reminded the Board that the Financial Wellness program would be sunset-ed by the end of 2025 and the remaining funds would be used for promotion of the new Enrich program. Non-Targeted funds refer to administrative expenses, which were \$301,599.89. Finally, the Worth & Wealth program had a budget of \$45,033.87 prior to the start of this season's seminars. In total, the Trust Fund had over \$1,000,000.

f. Annual Report

Ms. Van Tassel reminded Board Members that a shortened and concise version of the Annual Report was attached to the meeting materials. Treasurer Goldberg anticipated a motion for the approval of the 2024 Annual Report. Mr. Roy Belson motioned to approve the Report. Ms. Evelyn Murphy seconded the motion. With no further discussion, the motion moved to a roll-call vote.

Roy Belson: Yes.

Marybeth Breed: Yes.

Charles Desmond: Yes.

Jacqueline McPherson: Yes.

Tom Moreau: Yes.

Evelyn Murphy: Yes.

Britte McBride: Yes

Todd Ostrowski: Yes.

Yvonne Spicer: Yes.

Emily Torres-Cullinane Yes.

Deborah Goldberg: Yes

The motion carried- 11 in favor, 0 against.

After the vote, Ms. Van Tassel highlighted Ms. Samatha Larivee's excellent work on the annual report. Treasurer Goldberg echoed this praise.

g. Announcements

Ms. Van Tassel welcomed the new board members and thanked the previous board members. She notified the members that there would be an email sent to them to update their contact information.

Treasurer Goldberg reminded all that the next meeting would be Thursday, March 6th at 10 AM. Then, she sought a motion to adjourn. Ms. Yvonne Spicer motioned. Mr. Todd Ostrowski and Ms. Emily Torres-Cullinane seconded.

Roy Belson: Yes.

Marybeth Breed: Yes.

Charles Desmond: Yes.

Jacqueline McPherson: Yes.

Tom Moreau: Yes.

Evelyn Murphy: Yes.

Britte McBride: Yes

Todd Ostrowski: Yes.

Yvonne Spicer: Yes.

Emily Torres-Cullinane Yes.

Deborah Goldberg: Yes

The motion carried- 11 in favor, 0 against.

Treasurer Goldberg closed the meeting with happy and healthy holiday wishes.