



**Testimony of Secretary & Commissioner Amy Kershaw  
Department of Early Education and Care**

Fiscal Year 2027, House 2 Recommendation  
Joint Committee on Ways and Means

March 23, 2026

Good morning, Chair Payano, Chair Duffy, and members of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means.

My name is Amy Kershaw, and it is my privilege to serve as the Commissioner of the Commonwealth's Department of Early Education and Care (EEC). It's an honor to be before this Committee once again, alongside my colleagues Commissioners Martinez and Ortega, to discuss the progress we have made at EEC over the past year and how the Healey-Driscoll Administration's Fiscal Year 2027 (FY27) budget proposal will support continued progress in key areas of the agency's work.

As EEC Commissioner, I'm fortunate to work alongside more than 290 dedicated public servants at the Department. Over 70% of our staff work in one of our five regional offices in roles that are essential to our work at EEC, including our licensors, investigators, family access specialists, behavioral health specialists, and other specialty roles at the agency. The remaining staff are based in our central office at Milk Street in Boston.

EEC's dual mission is to provide access to stable, affordable child care so families can work or participate in education and training, and to support safe, high-quality learning experiences that prepare children to succeed in school and life. Early education is foundational to closing the opportunity gap in Massachusetts—bringing economic opportunity and mobility to families as well as educational opportunities to their children. Access to affordable child care is also an engine of the state's economy, enabling families of all income levels to participate in our workforce. We are both the workforce behind the workforce and the beginning of the educational journey for many of our youngest learners, including children in communities that have been most impacted by poverty or have historically lacked equitable educational opportunities.

In order to deliver on the agency’s mission, EEC administers several core functions. EEC licenses, monitors, and provides technical assistance to more than 9,200 programs across Massachusetts—including family child care, center-based infant and toddler and preschool programs, out-of-school time programs, residential group care facilities, and foster care and adoption placement agencies—with a total licensed capacity of approximately 265,000 children and youth. We also administer the state’s Child Care Financial Assistance (CCFA) programs, which supports nearly 70,000 children and includes 2,605 children of early education staff and more than 28,000 children from families served by DCF and DTA. Lastly, EEC provides professional development for early educators and program leaders, quality and operational supports including capital investments, and, through community partners, parent support and early literacy services for families across the Commonwealth.

The Governor’s FY27 budget proposal funds the agency at \$1.8 billion – a \$136 million, or 8 percent, increase above the final Fiscal Year 2026 (FY26) enacted budget. H.2 is supported by a Supplemental Budget that allocates Fair Share revenue to facilitate the FY27 budget proposal as filed. The Governor’s proposed investments in H.2 sustains and builds on the incredible progress we have achieved in the state’s early education and care sector in recent years and our shared commitment to a nation-leading early education and care system.

Since last year’s hearing, we have continued to advance the Governor’s Gateway to Pre-K Agenda, which aims to increase affordability and accessibility through three key programs administered by EEC: Commonwealth Cares for Children (C3), CCFA, and the Commonwealth Preschool Partnership Initiative (CPPI), and the innovative work of our Interagency Task Force on Early Education and Child Care.

C3 provides monthly operational funding to eligible providers, covering costs such as staff wages, benefits, rent, and supplies. C3 now supports more than 8,000 programs that employ more than 42,000 educators and has helped add more than 7,500 new child care seats over the past year – growing the system by more than 22,000 seats since before the pandemic. Wages for our educators have increased by approximately 20% and we are seeing reduced turnover across the sector.

The Governor’s budget funds C3 at \$475 million between general appropriation and Fair Share line items. We have said it before, and we’ll say it again—C3 is a game changer. It allows us to approach challenges in access, affordability, and workforce in a different way than virtually any other state.

We also continue to take steps to improve the accessibility and reach of the state’s Child Care Financial Assistance programs. Massachusetts families navigate among the highest child care costs in the nation and many families, particularly low-income working families, struggle to afford the full cost of high-quality early education. Today, thanks to collaborative investments by the Governor and our legislative partners, we are serving more families than ever before. Similar to the growth we have seen in licensed child care capacity, the number of families receiving help paying for child care now exceeds our highest pre-pandemic caseload by more than 10,000 children.

The Governor’s H.2 budget proposal includes \$1.2 billion for the state’s Child Care Financial Assistance programs. Governor Healey’s proposed investment will maintain assistance for up to 70,000 children enrolled through the Income Eligible and DTA- and DCF-related programs, incorporates recent rate increases to more closely cover the cost of care, and anticipates continued growth in the DTA- and DCF-related caseloads.

The third component of our Gateway to Pre-K agenda is the Commonwealth Preschool Partnership Initiative (CPPI) which is the State’s primary strategy for expanding universally accessible, preschool. Through targeted community-level funding, CPPI supports partnerships between public school districts and community-based early education providers. In addition to expanding access to low or no cost preschool, CPPI strengthens program quality at the local level by promoting curriculum alignment across settings and reducing barriers to special education services for young learners. CPPI now supports 30 communities, including 19 of our 26 Gateway Cities and is reaching 3,249 children across 103 providers, with 83% enrolled in center-based or family child care settings within our mixed delivery system.

Governor Healey’s FY27 budget proposal funds CPPI at \$31.95 million, an increase of \$11.45 million from FY26. The proposed funding level will further and deepen implementation progress in our existing 30 CPPI communities and will provide the opportunity for the remaining 7 Gateway Cities that are not currently participating to join the program through planning grants. This line item also includes \$5 million in funding for our Summer Step Up program, which supports summer learning programs for children entering kindergarten, bringing the total line-item to \$36.95M.

The fourth component of the Governor’s Gateway to Pre-K initiative is the Interagency Early Education and Child Care Task Force, which was created through an Executive Order in 2024 and is about to enter its third year. Chaired by the Secretaries of Education, Economic Development, and Labor and Workforce Development it includes representation of all Cabinet

level Secretariats. The Task Force is charged with taking a “whole of government” approach to addressing challenges and creating opportunities in child care and early education.

The Task Force has made significant progress in year two, establishing inter-agency working groups, sharing information, and developing innovative grant programs. We launched an Employer Child Care Innovation Fund and are working to rapidly scale early education and out-of-school time Registered Apprenticeships, including creating a Technical Assistance Hub to specifically support these unique apprenticeship programs. Further, we launched the Business Front Door with thoughtful and targeted attention to the needs of child care businesses. This is a modern, digital-focused platform designed to connect businesses with personalized guidance to navigate state funding opportunities and incentives. On March 6<sup>th</sup>, we released the Task Force’s Year Two Progress Report and I have brought a copy for each member of the Committee.

In addition to advancing the Gateway to Pre-K Agenda, the Governor’s FY27 proposal also reflects our commitment to meaningful cross-agency collaboration and the multi-generational supports essential to family success, maintaining funding for EEC’s key community partners:

- \$20 million to provide critical state funding for the Commonwealth’s 28 Head Start programs,
- \$11.7 million to support the 81 local partners who comprise our Coordinated Family and Community Engagement (CFCE) programs,
- \$4.25 million for Parent Child+, which provides support and resources to children and families to support long-term success in school and life,

The Governor’s proposal also includes \$22.3 million for the Children's Trust, a longstanding EEC partner and the Commonwealth's primary public-private organization focused on promoting family and community wellbeing working towards a Massachusetts free from child abuse and neglect. This includes \$18 million for home visiting through programs like Healthy Families Massachusetts, as well as Family Centers and fatherhood initiatives that support whole-family wellbeing across the state.

At the core of all of our work is centering and improving the experience of our educators and the families they and we serve. H.2 reflects that foundation — resources committed not just to sustaining a system, but to meaningfully improve the day-to-day experience of the educators, staff, and program directors who work in programs licensed by EEC and the children and families who rely on their care.

EEC is developing a new credentialing system that will provide a clear framework for professional growth and meaningful career pathways for our educators. This work includes alignment in professional expectations and offerings with our two- and four-year colleges as well as with other workforce training and certificate programs, including registered apprenticeships. Early Education and Out of School Time is now the fastest growing segment of the apprenticeship sector. Since we launched this work together in 2025, EEC and the Division of Apprenticeship Standards (DAS) within the Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development (EOLWD), have supported more than 350 apprentices across eight programs. We also continue to maximize enrollment in higher education for our workforce through both our Career Pathways and Early Educator Scholarship programs. And, earlier this month, thanks to funding in the Fiscal Year 2025 (FY25) state budget and the FY25 Fair Share supplemental budget, we launched the Commonwealth's first student loan repayment program dedicated to the early education and child care workforce. Applications opened on March 9th, with annual awards of up to \$7,500 per recipient – translating to meaningful compensation increases.

We are also committed to elevating the family voice in new ways. This year, EEC is establishing its first formal statewide [Family Advisory Council](#). The Council is designed to strengthen connections among families, educators, community partners, and policymakers in advancing affordable accessible, and high-quality early education and care. It will play an essential role in helping EEC build a more inclusive, responsive, and effective system. We received more than 200 applications from interested members and anticipate launching the Council in late spring.

Improving the experience of educators and families also requires investments in updated technology. Through Governor Healey's FutureTech Act, EEC is developing a new family portal and case management system for CCFA – a modern, mobile-friendly, multilingual platform designed to provide families with a more dignified and user-centered experience. Alongside this, we are building a new Professional Portal to serve as a one-stop shop for current and aspiring educators, supporting registration, certification, and ongoing professional learning.

None of this progress would be possible without the hard work of the talented EEC team. Adequate operational funding is essential to sustaining the agency's innovations as well as our core work in health and safety monitoring; conducting background record checks; ensuring program integrity and preventing fraud; and meeting all state and federal compliance standards. The Governor's proposed FY27 budget restores EEC's Administrative accounts to FY25 funding levels, addressing an unsustainable \$4M reduction in the FY26 budget that is requiring the agency to use one-time Fair Share supplemental funds to fill this gap to maintain core functions. Restoring these accounts to FY25 levels will protect existing staffing levels, maintaining our

capacity to oversee child care funding and services across the Commonwealth. Additionally, restoration of these funds helps the agency meet its matching requirement for federal spending, ensuring we maximize revenue to the Commonwealth and leave no “money on the table.” We ask for your support in restoring this critical funding in the FY27 budget.

As I have shared previously with the Committee, achieving a system that is sustainable, equitable, and responsive requires pressing simultaneously on the multiple levers of family access and affordability, educator recruitment and retention, and program stability – supported by strong agency operations and capacity. The Healey-Driscoll Administration’s FY27 budget proposal continues to support the agency along that path. I look forward to continuing our partnership as we work together to modernize and build the early education and care system that helps our programs, educators, families, children and the economy thrive.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide this testimony. I am happy to answer any questions committee members may have.