

**Board of Early Education and Care
January 10, 2024
1:00 PM – 4:00 PM**

**YWCA Central Massachusetts
1 Salem Street
Worcester, MA 01608**
<https://www.youtube.com/c/EECMass>

Members of the Board of Early Education and Care Present

Dr. Patrick Tutwiler, Secretary of Education
Amy Kershaw, Commissioner
Paul Belsito, Chair
Maria Gonzalez Moeller, Vice-Chair
Carolyn Kain, J.D., Designee for HHS Secretary Kate Walsh (via phone)
Jamella Lee
Nicki Ruiz de Luzuriaga (via phone)
George K. Atanasov
Mora Segal (via phone)
Linda D. Sagor, M.D., M.P.H.
Stephanie M. Curenton, Ph.D. (via phone)
Cheryl Travers

Welcome and Comments from the Chair

Chair Belsito provided opening comments and welcomed Deb Hall, President and CEO of YWCA. Ms. Hall welcomed the Board and discussed the history of the YWCA and the services they provide. Chair Belsito provided an overview of the agenda for today's meeting.

Comments from the Secretary

Secretary Tutwiler wished the Board a happy new year and reflected on the administration's commitment to expanding affordable, high-quality care in the upcoming calendar year with a focus on the organizing principles of stabilize, heal and transform. Secretary Tutwiler discussed ongoing efforts to finalize the FY25 budget. Secretary Tutwiler provided an update regarding the Future Tech Act.

Comments from the Commissioner

Commissioner Kershaw welcomed the Board and thanked Ms. Hall and her team for hosting the Board meeting and for their service to the community. Commissioner Kershaw provided an update regarding the FY24 budget and the anticipated impact of the recent reduction in funding. Commissioner Kershaw provided an update regarding the market rate survey and shared that formal approval was received for the alternative methodology. Commissioner Kershaw provided an update regarding the Commonwealth Preschool Partnership Initiative.

Statements from the Public

Chair Belsito acknowledged that public comment received by email was distributed to the Board prior to the meeting.

Johanna Mosson provided public comment regarding her positive and impactful experience at her local Coordinated Family Community Engagement (CFCE) program, Worcester Family Partnership, and expressed support for the program.

Joe Chan provided public comment in support of CFCE programs and shared how her family has benefitted from the holistic services provided by her local program.

Amira Mondwe [sic] provided public comment in support Worcester Family Partnership and shared how her family has benefited from their services.

Routine Business:

- Approval of Minutes from December 13, 2023 Meeting – VOTE
 - Approved with Board Member Travers abstaining.

Break until 1:25PM

Items for Discussion and Action:

Commissioner Kershaw apologized for technical issues and affirmed EEC’s commitment to traveling to programs throughout the Commonwealth to allow for informed discussions with families and programs. Commissioner Kershaw provided an overview of the agenda.

- FY24 Child Care Facility Investment Planning Updates

Commissioner Kershaw welcomed Jocelyn Bowne-EEC Deputy Commissioner for Research, Innovation, and Supports, Jose Mendez-EEC Director of Child Care Business Operations & Facilities, and Neil J. Flynn-EEC Acting General Counsel to provide an update on Child Care Facility Investment Planning. Deputy Commissioner Bowne discussed the grant funding programs being utilized to invest in capital improvements for child care facilities. Mr. Mendez provided an update regarding the Early Education and Out-of-School Time (EEOST) Capital Grant Fund program. Commissioner Kershaw clarified that EEC is currently identifying a partner to manage the capital grants for family child care providers and affirmed the agency’s commitment to supporting capital investments for family child care providers. Commissioner Kershaw acknowledged Board Member Kain for her previous suggestion to revise regulations to support hybrid EEOST capital grant fund awards and further acknowledged that public comment was received. Acting General Counsel Flynn provided background information regarding previous revisions to the regulations and shared feedback received through public comment.

- Early Education and Out-of-School Time (EEOST) Capital Fund Regulation Revisions – VOTE
 - Approved unanimously.
- Child Care Financial Assistance

Commissioner Kershaw welcomed Amy Checkoway-EEC Senior Associate Commissioner for Policy, Research, & Data, Adrienne Murphy-EEC Director of Data Analytics, and Ian Cutler-Director of Project

Management and Strategy to discuss recommendations related to Child Care Financial Assistance Reimbursement Rates. Ms. Checkoway provided an overview and summary of the financial assistance system. Ms. Checkoway discussed data collection efforts to better understand the cost of child care for families and programs to create a simplified and equitable rate structure. Ms. Checkoway outlined the strategy and goals for rate increases and reforms and highlighted considerations for consolidating rates. Ms. Checkoway detailed FY24 funding sources available for rate increases. Ms. Murphy discussed the sequence of calculations to allocate resources for the rate increases. Ms. Checkoway reviewed the three rate revision options previously presented to the Board. Ms. Murphy detailed the variables and considerations for the recommended three rate option. Commissioner Kershaw clarified that the three-rate recommendation includes data related to family child care providers but approval for the revisions is subject to union bargaining. Ms. Murphy discussed how the three-rate option makes progress toward the 50th percentile of the market rate and shared details how the current rates cover the cost of care and how the three-rate option will impact that distribution and Commissioner Kershaw clarified that the current costs do not reflect aspirational increased salaries or staffing. Ms. Murphy shared data related to rate increases for center based and family child care programs by age group over three years. Ms. Murphy shared additional reimbursement rate recommendations. Ms. Checkoway provided a final summary of the three-rate recommendation. Chair Belsito commented on the mindset shift for long-term goal setting and action to achieve continual improvement in the financial assistance system. Board Member Sagor expressed appreciation for the information and the presentation which allowed the Board to make an informed decision. Board Member Curenton inquired about the new region structure and Ms. Checkoway and Commissioner Kershaw clarified that the three-rate recommendation does not consolidate regions but consolidates rates across the regions. Chair Belsito extended gratitude to the Administration and Legislature for their commitment to resources. Commissioner Kershaw discussed potential future areas for revision going forward.

- FY24 Reimbursement Rate Increases and Proposed Reforms – VOTE
 - Approved
- Commonwealth Cares for Children (C3) Grant Updates

Commissioner Kershaw welcomed Jocelyn Bowne-EEC Deputy Commissioner for Research, Innovation, and Supports, Amy Checkoway-EEC Senior Associate Commissioner for Policy, Research, & Data Analytics and Adrienne Murphy-EEC Director of Data Analytics to provide an update on the latest survey data collected through the Commonwealth Care for Children (C3) Grant. Deputy Commissioner Bowne and Commissioner Kershaw discussed the role C3 funds play in supporting the early education and care market. Commissioner Kershaw detailed the history of the C3 grant program. Ms. Checkoway and Ms. Murphy provided an overview of the Fall 2023 Survey. Ms. Murphy shared data received from providers related to licensed capacity. Ms. Murphy shared data related to how providers utilized C3 funding and noted, for this survey, providers were asked to share spending information since the beginning of the fiscal year through the end of October when the survey was released, rather than cumulatively over the life of the grant. Ms. Murphy shared data related to educator wages and family affordability. Ms. Murphy discussed how C3 funding supports programs, educators and families and the impact that losing C3 funding would have on each. Commissioner Kershaw commented that the impact of C3 funding is clear and thanked providers for their participation in the survey. Board Member Atanasov, Vice-Chair Moeller, Ms. Murphy and Deputy Commissioner Bowne discussed drivers for unfilled staff openings, how the survey attempts to understand those drivers and potential solutions. Commissioner Kershaw and Vice-Chair Moeller discussed how the revised Financial Assistance regulations have resulted in an increase to provider participation in the system.

Chair Belsito provided closing comments.

Meeting concluded at 2:30PM.