**Board of Early Education and Care**

**March 21, 2023**

**1:00 PM – 4:00 PM**

**Department of Early Education and Care, Central Office**

**50 Milk Street, 5th Floor**

**Boston, MA 02110**

[https://www.youtube.com/c/EECMass](https://urldefense.com/v3/__https:/nam04.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https*3A*2F*2Furldefense.com*2Fv3*2F__https*3A*2Fwww.youtube.com*2Fc*2FEECMass__*3B!!CUhgQOZqV7M!mtJGkDA0V8yVgg2uKSG9uy90hzVOfMC6kxew8RLmPytYEKM5G63U2wNQX5lmit0oRma9LJJQvSy2Xg9khjIXdBkRMbjsJqM*24&data=05*7C01*7Cmike*40renvisioning.com*7Cfc2fcdfea44a4844760708da926316e2*7C804f5616b15149f0831435a91562ab97*7C0*7C0*7C637983251547746626*7CUnknown*7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0*3D*7C3000*7C*7C*7C&sdata=GfmZaBZpVTD29gjgCI6wqLvtPwwz9k3Ct84ytJS62uk*3D&reserved=0__;JSUlJSUlJSUlJSUlJSUlJSUlJSUlJSUlJSUl!!CUhgQOZqV7M!nAONvpYnuUFeIIGmPyWAYzixbXXP4opicM2oKiaL2PxTSq3vmDXa1fDb49UwAzr-myowXZhp4oTO75KqUO9_ZCMBwQ$)

**Members of the Board of Early Education and Care Present**

Paul Belsito, Chairperson

Dr. Patrick Tutwiler, Secretary of Education

Amy Kershaw, Acting Commissioner

Jamella Lee (via phone)

Maria Gonzalez Moeller (via phone)

George Atanasov

Cheryl Travers (via phone)

Carolyn Kain, J.D., Designee for HHS Secretary Kate Walsh

Stephanie Curenton, Ph.D.

Members of the Board of Early Education and Care Not Present

Linda D. Sagor, M.D., M.P.H

Nikki Ruiz de Luzuriaga

Mora Segal

**AGENDA:**

**Welcome and Comments from the Chair**

Chairperson Belsito called the meeting to order and offered congratulations to Commissioner Kershaw on her official appointment as Commissioner of the Department Early Education and Care.

**Comments from the Secretary**

Secretary Tutwiler expressed appreciation for the work of early educators and shared that he has been gaining valuable insight through visiting programs over the past three months. He reiterated his commitment to being accessible. Secretary Tutwiler acknowledged Commissioner Kershaw and her commitment to and passion for the early education and care sector. Secretary Tutwiler commended Commissioner Kershaw for her respect for providers and families.

**Comments from the Commissioner**

Commissioner Kershaw thanked Chairperson Belsito, Secretary Tutwiler, and the Board for their support and shared that it is an honor to serve in her role at this time.

Commissioner Kershaw provided an update regarding the Commonwealth Cares for Children C3 survey, which will be available at the end of April. She expressed appreciation for those filling out the survey, as the data is critical for insight into the field and the impact of the grants.

Commissioner Kershaw highlighted that the Early Education and Care Scholarship Program will be available April 1 and is open to currently employed child care staff who are enrolled or who would like to enroll in higher education. Information will be on EEC website. Commissioner Kershaw noted that conversations are ongoing with the Department of Higher Education to ensure that the program is meeting the needs of early education and care staff.

Commissioner Kershaw provided an overview of the agenda and highlighted that Requests for Proposals for childcare resource and referral services will be posted in the next few days and highlighted that these contracts are tools to make the early education and care system accessible, affordable, and family-centric.

Commissioner Kershaw noted that all EEC regulations will be reviewed, modernized, and updated and conversations with the Board will be ongoing as the Department engages in that work. Commissioner Kershaw noted that the financial assistance regulations are currently in formal review and it is anticipated that the Board will vote on the changes in April.

**Statements from the Public\***

Chairperson Belsito acknowledged that public comment was received prior to the Board meeting and has been shared.

**Routine Business:**

* Approval of Minutes from February 14, 2023 Meeting – VOTE
  + Approved
* Approval of Minutes from February 21, 2023 Meeting – VOTE
  + Approved

**Items for Discussion and Action:**

* FY24 Governor’s Budget Proposal

Chief Financial Officer Amanda Sakaguchi provided an overview of the H.1 budget, which includes $1.5 Billion for EEC in FY24, and noted that the Governor’s budget recommendations are the first step in the budget process. Commissioner Kershaw noted that the funding for the Commonwealth Cares for Children grant program is fully funded from state sources. Ms. Sakaguchi highlighted that, for the first time, this budget includes a $20M to increase provider rates, which demonstrates this Administration’s commitment to affordability and access. Ms. Sakaguchi provided highlights of the FY24 budget recommendations and discussed the line-item appropriations. Commissioner Kershaw noted that this FY24 budget is a 25% increase over the general appropriations act in FY23. Ms. Sakaguchi discussed the timeline for the FY24 budget process and noted that House Ways and Means will release their budget in April. Commissioner Kershaw asked for any questions or comments from the Board regarding the budget. Chairperson Belsito expressed gratitude to Commissioner Kershaw and Secretary Tutwiler for their advocacy. Board member Kain echoed Chairperson Belsito’s comments and added that children and families will benefit from the increased funding.

* Child Care Financial Assistance
  + Early Childhood Educator Pilot Update

Commissioner Kershaw welcomed Deputy Commissioner Tyreese Nicolas and Senior Project Manager Julia Bucek to provide an overview and background of the child care financial assistance system. Deputy Commissioner Nicolas highlighted that the goal of the system is to provide access to financial assistance and invest in quality initiatives. She discussed the qualifications for a family to receive financial assistance and outlined the constructs. Commissioner Kershaw highlighted that the federal government sets standards for EEC to operate within. Deputy Commissioner Nicolas discussed the three types of child care financial assistance programs and how families access the programs. Commissioner Kershaw clarified that DCF and DTA referrals for financial assistance are entitlement programs. Deputy Commissioner Nicolas explained two ways to access financial assistance are through vouchers and contracted slots. She clarified that vouchers are managed by CCR&Rs and contracted slots are managed by providers. Commissioner Kershaw highlighted that vouchers can be transferred to different programs. Board member Atanasov inquired as to the benefit of vouchers and contracted slots. Commissioner Kershaw noted that the federal government requires parent choice and Massachusetts has historically offered contracted slots to offer stability and predictability for program financing.

Senior Project Manager Julia Bucek provided insight into the parent journey through the financial assistance system for the income eligible program and Deputy Commissioner Nicolas discussed the family journey for DCF and DTA. Deputy Commissioner Nicolas highlighted that priority populations that can receive referrals for vouchers and contracted slots and include families experiencing homelessness, young parents, and children with special needs. She emphasized that priority families, DCF, and DTA referrals are not placed on the waitlist. Board member Kain inquired about access for children in DCF custody and Deputy Commissioner Nicolas clarified that DCF has a temporary childcare program for emergency situations to provide immediate access while they transfer to a more stable situation.

Board member Curenton inquired into the actual timeframes that parents remain on the waitlist and Commissioner Kershaw stated that the waitlists are managed regionally and there is not currently accurate data but the time could be 6 months to over 1 year. Commissioner Kershaw discussed the waitlist cleanup project and stated that through the CCR&R procurement process, the waitlist process will be modernized.

Deputy Commissioner Nicolas provided an overview of the current state of financial assistance, highlighting data related to subsided provider capacity and the budget implications. Board member Kain inquired into the reason why there are less center-based programs participating in the subsidy program and Commissioner Kershaw shared that programs point to the rate as a challenge to participating and stated that information regarding the cost of care study and rate structure rate will be discussed at next month’s Board meeting. Chairperson Belsito commented that there remains work to do and reflected on the work currently being done to modernize the system and increase access and affordability. Commissioner Kershaw and Board member Kain discussed the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on access to care and Commissioner Kershaw stated that one of the urgent needs to update the waitlist data is to understand capacity challenges. Board member Atanasov asked for clarification regarding the statistic that 57% of providers accept subsidies and inquired how Massachusetts compares to other states, and Commissioner Kershaw stated that it would be interesting to correlate that data with rates. There was discussion on strategies to collect data and Commissioner Kershaw highlighted that the upcoming C3 survey contains questions about the financial assistance program. Board member Kain inquired if there could be a correlation between licensing and subsidy acceptance. Ms. Bucek provided an overview of the current initiatives and highlighted the digital application and waitlist clean-up project. Commissioner Kershaw and Deputy Commissioner Nicolas discussed improvements to communication. Chairperson Belsito inquired about data points to measure success.

Commissioner Kershaw introduced Deputy General Counsel Robert Orthman to discuss the proposed revisions to financial assistance regulations and noted that the proposed revisions are still under review and she anticipates a vote on the changes at the April board meeting.

Deputy General Counsel Orthman provided an overview of the regulatory changes. Deputy General Counsel Orthman discussed the process and timeline for public comment and discussed the common recommendations received. Commissioner Kershaw stated that the intention is for the revised regulations to be effective July 1 and shared that related policies and procedures are currently being revised. Chairperson Belsito stated that the public comment has improved these revisions and that he is looking forward to finalizing the changes.

Deputy Commissioner Nicolas provided an update on the early educator pilot project. She shared the main goals of the pilot and highlighted that the basic eligibility is for employed staff who are Massachusetts residents with a household income of 85% of SMI, which equates to $97,058/year for a family of 3. Commissioner Kershaw noted that the SMI was raised for the pilot to expand access. Deputy Commissioner Nicolas shared that 1,300 families have been reached as of last week with 277 children enrolled. She highlighted that 77 parent educators have an income of between 50% and 85%. These parent educators were already on the waitlist and, through the pilot program, they were able to receive priority access. Deputy Commissioner Nicholas shared feedback from the CCR&Rs that the process is moving faster for eligible families on the waitlist. Deputy Commissioner Kershaw shared preliminary program data and noted that there will be a survey to dig deeper into program feedback and data. She stated that there is an intention to learn more about families who have not been reached through the pilot program and programs who are not participating. Deputy Commissioner Nicolas shared next steps for the pilot program. Commissioner Kershaw noted that the most common feedback received was based on the income eligibility and concern regarding creating a cliff effect. Chairperson Belsito commented on the expected and unexpected results of the pilot program.

Board member Curenton asked for specific data points to be collected including comparisons of financial assistance recipients before and after the regulation changes and to see changes across the SMI range.

Chairperson Belsito expressed appreciation to Commissioner Kershaw and the EEC team for their work modernizing the financial assistance system to improve accessibility, affordability, quality, and the family experience of working with EEC. He acknowledged that data is needed to ensure that decisions are well-intended.

Board member Kain shared her opinion as a long-serving member of the Board that EEC has provided an unprecedented positive response during the COVID-19 pandemic and commended the staff and the field for their impact on families and providers.

Meeting adjourned at 2:30PM