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February 13, 2023

Acting Commissioner Kershaw  
MA Department of Early Education and Care  
50 Milk Street, 14<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Boston, MA 02109

Re: Testimony for February 14, 2023, Early Education and Care Board Meeting

Acting Commissioner Kershaw and esteemed members of the Board of Early Education and Care,

As you are aware, despite the devastating impacts of the pandemic, there is fantastic work happening in early childhood right now in Massachusetts. Because of that, I am excited to see that *Defining a Career Pathway and Credentialing System* is the focus for tomorrow's meeting.

To frame this testimony for newer Board members, Family Services of Central Massachusetts, through expansion grant funding from the Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development (MA EOLWD), has been able to offer an innovative, solutions-based early childhood apprenticeship program, Project Flourish for the past two years. This registered apprenticeship provides 150 hours of Related Technical Instruction and 2,000 of mentor-supported On-the-Job Training.

The apprenticeship is a commitment of 12-15 months by the educator. Successful completers earn an Apprenticeship Certificate from EOLWD. They also have the options to determine their EEC career pathway by applying for the nationally known Child Development Associate (CDA) credential offered by the Council for Professional Recognition, EEC Teacher or Lead Teacher certification, matriculating in an Early Childhood program at a local college while being granted 6-9 free credits for their experience, and participating in career counseling as they develop their Individual Professional Development Plans. All of this is provided for no cost to the educator who is very likely a low-wage earner due to the current economic structures and market constraints.

Alarmed by the dwindling Early Childhood Education workforce in Massachusetts, staff of Family Services of Central Mass Center for Childcare Careers (CCC) and area early childhood advocates were compelled to think creatively about how to rebuild the pipeline for the workforce. After exploring available funding sources in 2018, CCC pursued and was granted non-traditional apprenticeship expansion funding by MA EOLWD. Since that initial award, MA EOLWD has committed and invested over \$300,000 in Family Services of Central MA's program, the only registered apprenticeship in early childhood education in Massachusetts. As part of this endeavor, twenty-two employer partners in this region have now partnered to participate in Project Flourish to help

meet their needs for a better qualified staff and to increase employee retention, a major challenge currently impacting the field.

In 2021, through a highly competitive grant process, the United Way of Central Mass chose and awarded Project Flourish with a \$100,000 potentially renewable grant to support Spanish-speaking Family Childcare Educators. EOLWD has not yet formalized a structure inclusive of family childcare educators in MA although the model exists in multiple other states including Rhode Island, Vermont, and soon, Connecticut. United Way of Central MA awarded funding because the program specifically met the call to stabilize and expand the quality of care available for families in the Worcester area, to support small businesses, and to address inclusion and equitable access to professional training for members of the LatinX community.

The pandemic significantly changed the implementation process for the project, but we quickly shifted and adapted to provide all elements critical to participant success and to meet the vision of the project. The adaptations to a digital delivery mode removed barriers that previously hindered or prevented entry level candidates from engaging in an academic experience to build their skills. These are the very same barriers that have been consistent for many marginalized communities- lack of transportation, lack of childcare, cost, and language or literacy levels insufficient for immediate placement into credit bearing classes in the college setting. The doors that open for completers fit smoothly into a continuum of professional roles. Participation is also open for educators who have worked in the field long term but who have not formalized their education yet to build towards their personal career goals.

As you consider the career pathway and credentialing system, we urge you to also consider these elements:

- In Massachusetts, people come into the field with an interest or passion for working with children. The field needs to continue to welcome and develop their skills by meeting them where they are and providing options for adult learners that pragmatically fit into their lives as employees, parents, children caring for elders, taxpayers, home owners, etc.
- Continue to expand and support professional training opportunities like apprenticeship to provide more access and equity by embracing and honoring the diverse rich culture we appreciate in Massachusetts.
- Recognize apprenticeship on the pathway to support individuals who have made a formal commitment to the competency-based model by supporting adult learners to internalize instruction of best practices in modes compatible with their learning styles, desired pace and that intentionally provides an opportunity to build confidence in language and literacy abilities for non-native speakers of English while providing contextualized-learning relevant to their daily work.

- Develop future leaders from within the field by supporting and training skilled educators to be peer mentors, recognizing their current career work and providing an avenue to the administrative roles that will continue to open as the highly-committed but aging leadership prepare to retire.

The apprentices participating so far are passionate, willing, engaged individuals that want to work in the field of early childhood education. Academically, there have been barriers to success or the immediate enrollment in college. Some report having attempted participating in college courses and finding the pace or language level to be daunting. When an adult chooses voluntarily to expand their education level and build their skills in a field that desperately needs them, competency-based apprenticeship is a practical solution that provides training to ensure they are successful educators and employees. In addition, the skilled professionals serving as mentors supporting flourishing educators are growing their interpersonal and mentoring skills, both highly desirable transferable skills for strong future leaders.

Much like the children we all serve, educators of all levels thrive when acknowledged for being incredibly hard-working professionals. Massachusetts has a tremendous opportunity to help our career pathway to be more robust by including apprenticeship and mentorship as steps on the career pathway. Please recognize Apprenticeship and Mentor on the Early Childhood Education Career Pathway to reflect the value and diversity of the current educators and those we hope to attract in the future.

With deepest regard,



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