

Submitted Written Public Comment for August 11 Board of Early Education and Care Board Meeting

CAPV Head Start Hampshire, Franklin, Hampden Counties/Courtney Clifford

My name is Courtney Clifford and I am a Developmental Specialist with the CAPV Head Start and Early Learning Programs, which covers the area of Hampshire, Franklin and portions of Hampden Counties. I am writing today to express my deep concern about the decisions that have been made, and continue to be made, by this oversight body in regard to the reopening of daycare sites and early childhood programs.

In my opinion, it is stunning that the decisions regarding the reopening of early childhood programs differ so greatly for those being made in regard to public schools.

When the initial reopening phase began, there were minimal efforts made by EEC to receive honest feedback from the providers in the field, and virtually no capacity for an accounting of the disparities between provider needs and EEC decision making. In my community, several early childhood programs have closed during this period of uncertainty. Due to the lack of resources provided by the state, combined with the virtually impossible requirements that reopening would entail, providers that would not have otherwise planned to close their doors have been forced to do so. Because of those decisions, there are families in our communities that will not have childcare available to them when this period of chaos has ended.

Furthermore, our teachers in the early childhood field are aware that while they are physically back in their classrooms, many public schools are choosing to do remote learning or hybrid learning. I implore you to imagine the devastating crash in morale among those in the early childhood field due to these decisions.

I was willing to give the benefit of the doubt to EEC during the initial phases of reopening. But as I have seen the monitoring requirements to providers only increase, with no equal efforts being made to support (financially or otherwise) those same programs, I can no longer remain quiet.

I ask that your agency reconsider the ways in which these decisions are being made. If significant changes to this process are not put into place, I believe that there will be few childcare programs available to children and families in the future.

Thank you for reviewing my concerns.

Sincerely,
Courtney Clifford

CAPV Head Start Hampshire, Franklin Hampden Counties/Marianne Bouthilette

Dear Commissioner Sam,

My name is Marianne Bouthilette and I am the Director of Child & Family Support Services at CAPV Head Start & Early Learning Programs. Let me start off by saying that I am honored to work in a program that employs over 150 dedicated staff, many which have been with us five years or more (up to 30 years). We have just about 100 educators who work in Franklin, Hampshire and Western Hampden Counties. Personally, I have been working in the field for over 25 years and at Head Start for 17 of those years. I love the work that I do and would not have stayed so as long if I did not have the passion and commitment for the families, children and staff that I do (I did not stay for the pay). This is the same for many I work with. However, today I am writing to you because of the unjust way I feel Early Education and Care staff are being treated. Let's start with the word "Education" as far as I know EEC includes the word "Education." So I ask, why are public schools not opening in the fall or going to a hybrid model in many of the communities our schools are located. What I hear is that school districts feel it is for the safety of the children and the teachers. Therefore, I ask, why it is different for those providing education and care for our 0-5 population. As I watch the news and see teachers picketing indicating they do not want to return I ask, what if those in the EEC field did that? Those working in the EEC field have never truly been compensated for the work they do and they are the backbone of the work force! Therefore, that is why they are being asked to go back to work, so the economy can move forward. This is an injustice for sure! Please, Please, Please acknowledge the injustice between EEC and DOE we need to hear that. The time is now to pay fair wages to educators. Our educators come to work rain or shine to be with children and now they are faced with new challenges. We have had some staff and children out with COVID symptoms and had to close a couple of classrooms pending test results. More than ever we need to face what is happening and take action, the EEC workforce is depending on it and if action is not taken who would want to go into this field, what message is being sent. Please save the EEC workforce!

The time is now, please do the right thing.

Thank you for reading this email,

Marianne

ScribbleTime Child Care/ Noelle D'Intino

Hello, my name is Noelle D'Intino and I'm the owner of a child care center, ScribbleTime, in Massachusetts. First, let me say thank you for the support you have given Centers during this health crisis. Unchartered territory and in true Early Education fashion everyone steps up.

I want to bring to your attention the issue with employees, this is across many Centers I know and my own.

- Employees are beginning to get the symptoms and then are out for 2 – 3 weeks awaiting testing results
- Employees are going to get testing and lying about the test date so when they return they have had the results for weeks
- Employees do not want to return from unemployment, although there is no new \$600 extra
- Employees are complaining that they want to go home and they are not needed as we are over staffing the groups of 10 to ensure we are following all cleaning policies
- New hires are not showing up once they agree to
- New hires don't want to come until January, as they think we will be "back to normal" then

What can the Department of Early Education do to assist the private pay Centers with dealing with these issues. My greatest fear, besides having COVID inside my Center, is telling families they can no longer come because we can't get the staffing.

Can you work with Senator Warren's office or the Governor to determine penalties for failure to return? Such as tax penalties or loss of drivers license? We need faster turn around on test times. If we are an important bedrock of the economy, then something drastic needs to be done by the government so we can staff our businesses.

Thank you for your continued support and time.
Noelle D'Intino

Child Care Provider Alison Barnes

My name is Alison Barnes. I am a licensed family child care provider in Chelmsford.

I am writing with public comment today, because it is important for child care providers to have confidence in their licensing department. Right now, there is a lack of transparency with regard to the number of programs affected by COVID-19.

To date, I am unaware of any publicly published information on the number of covid cases identified or affecting child care programs in Massachusetts. We do not know if child care centers, family child cares, or school age out of school programs are being affected by the virus. We do not know the efficacy of the regulations put in place to prevent the spread of illness.

I have asked during town hall presentations. I have asked my licensor, the regional supervisor, and the local board of health. No one has an answer nor, it seems, is anyone granted permission to share information that they know. Families enrolling their children in these programs should know the calculated risk they are taking in exposing their children to a virus that we know very little about. We don't know what the long term effects of exposure to COVID-19 will have on children. We don't know if we are setting them up to live with lifelong injury from illness.

It is unreasonable to ask providers to continue working as essential workers without providing knowledge of the risk they are taking. I urge you to request data from the commissioner on the number of children and child care providers that have tested positive or been tested because of contact tracing due to exposure in a child care program. I urge you to request data on the number of programs that have had to close a classroom, their entire program, or had to have staff stop working due to COVID exposure or positive diagnosis.

In short, the following question should be plainly stated and available to the public: What are the infection rates in child care programs?

Thank you for considering my input.

Young World Child Care/ Jessica Clark

Dear Board of Early Education and Care Members,

I was excited to hear that you were including re-opening capacity on the agenda for your board meeting today. I have been very stressed with the fact that I have many on a waitlist for my program but I do not have the capacity to help as many families as we would like to. Not only do we have a waitlist, but we have an after school program that we will need to be able to grow in capacity since children in our area will be remote learning.

Recently, there have been many closures of Child Care Centers in our area. If we can increase our revenue we will be able to sustain our center that has been in business for 41 years. With the increase of revenue, it will allow our program to compensate the educators that came back to us after earning more on unemployment than being employed.

Thank you for your time and consideration,
Jessica Clark

A Place to Grow/Heather Sullivan

Massachusetts Board of Early Education and Care

August 10, 2020

Chair Lesaux and Board of Early Education and Care Members,

Thank you for including the re-opening capacity on the agenda for your board meeting today.

As a program director, I would like to submit a statement requesting the immediate release of the new capacity requirements. I support the efforts of the Commissioner and the Department to follow the science and align square footage, capacity and other requirements to make our centers safe for all. I also appreciate the Commissioner's partnership with the field and her collaborative approach to making the guidelines reflective of high quality and responsive to the many emerging challenges.

While I know that there are many guidelines to modify in this ever-changing landscape, the capacity alignment is most pressing.

Capacity alignment will not only allow us to serve more families safely, it will ensure that more centers can remain economically viable and therefore, maintain the high quality care we provide for families. By being more economically viable, we can compensate our teachers fairly and meet the highest quality standards at the same level of our public and independent school counterparts.

I have also been working towards trying to meet the guidelines by thinking creatively and working with my landlord to add space. I need the Dept to work quickly to license new space to continue to serve the families and meet the guidelines. Rumors have said that new space is not being licensed at this time and I hope that is not the case.

With less than a month until September, we need to know this information now. I have many families waiting to know if they will have care for Sept. and what hours I can serve them. Without the new guidelines and the licensing of new space, I don't have answers for them.

Over the summer, we have all demonstrated that we as a field are ready and able to serve children. Now, if we could have the increased capacity guidelines, EEC programs and parents can plan to sustain the vital work of educating our youngest citizens and meet the Commonwealth's educational goals.

Thank you for your consideration, your commitment to the field and your support of our work.

Sincerely,

Heather Sullivan, Director
A Place to Grow, Arlington

Charlestown Nursery School/ Cady Audette and Kelly Pellagrini

Massachusetts Board of Early Education and Care

August 10, 2020

Chair Lesaux and Board of Early Education and Care Members,

Thank you for including the re-opening capacity on the agenda for your board meeting today.

As program directors, we would like to submit a statement requesting the immediate release of the new capacity requirements. We support the efforts of the Commissioner and Department of Early Education and Care to follow the science and align square footage, capacity and other requirements with the fall DESE guidelines. We are grateful for the Commissioner's partnership with the field and her collaborative approach to making the guidelines reflective of high quality and responsive to the many emerging challenges.

While we know there are many guidelines to modify in this ever-changing landscape, the capacity alignment is most pressing.

Capacity alignment will not only allow us to serve more families safely, it will ensure that more centers remain economically viable and maintain quality. Most importantly, it will allow our programs to compensate educators fairly and meet the highest quality standards at the same level of our public and independent school counterparts. It will give children across the state the same access to best practice. Moreover, it will prevent another wave of closures this fall.

Frankly, with less than a month until September, any further delay puts the Department of Early Education and Care's successful re-opening, stabilization and strategic planning efforts at risk. If the capacity requirements are not aligned, programs will cut important services. In fact, we are one of countless programs that will not be able to remain open because of this regulatory inconsistency, inequity and unnecessary bureaucratic delay.

Given that these guidelines were made available to DESE in June and the science continues to support the recommendations, we hope you can prioritize the timely release to the EEC community so we can prepare for September just as elementary, secondary and higher education have.

Over the summer, we have demonstrated that we are ready and able to serve children. Now, if we could have the increased capacity guidelines, EEC programs and parents can plan to sustain the vital work of educating our youngest citizens and meet the Commonwealth's educational goals.

We thank you for your consideration, your commitment to the field and your support of our work. We look forward to getting the aligned guidelines for increased capacity so that we can continue to serve children well.

Sincerely,

Cady Audette and Kelly Pellagrini
Charlestown Nursery School

The Children’s Cooperative Nurse School/Elizabeth Mason

Board of Early Education and Care Members,

I had hoped to receive the adjusted re-opening guidelines yesterday, and remain eager to see them, so that I can plan accordingly. Thank you for including the re-opening capacity on the agenda for your board meeting today.

As a Program Director, I support the efforts of the Commissioner and Department of Early Education and Care to follow the science and align square footage, capacity and other requirements with the fall DESE guidelines. I am grateful for the Commissioner’s partnership with the field and her collaborative approach to making the guidelines reflective of high quality and responsive to the many emerging challenges.

As my school, in addition to so many others, is now one month from our anticipated re-opening; I greatly fear any further delay in releasing the updated regulations. I am sure you understand, it is increasingly more difficult to manage the enrollment and re-opening process, with so many unanswered questions.

I hope the adjusted guidelines will be released as soon as possible, so that myself and all other directors within the EEC community can move forward and fully prepare (or come to realize we are unable) for September.

Thank you for all of your hard work, time, and dedication.
Sincerely,

Elizabeth Mason
Program Director
The Children's Cooperative Nursery School

The Learning Experience/Courtney O'Rourke and Maribel Vilchis
Massachusetts Board of Early Education and Care

August 11, 2020

Chair Lesaux and Board of Early Education and Care Members,

Thank you for including the re-opening capacity on the agenda for your board meeting today.

As a program director, I speak for myself the assistant director and owner as I am sure other directors in the state would like to submit a statement requesting the immediate release of the new capacity requirements. We support the efforts of the Commissioner and Department of Early Education and Care to follow the science and align square footage, capacity and other requirements with the fall DESE guidelines. We are grateful for the Commissioner's partnership with the field and her collaborative approach to making the guidelines reflective of high quality and responsive to the many emerging challenges.

While we know there are many guidelines to modify in this ever-changing landscape, the capacity alignment is most pressing.

We are a franchise center that is individually owned. The bill have not stopped for us nor have they drastically decreased. We still provide meals for the children (especially because those who relay on us for a healthy meal) our rent has not changed and still needs to be paid, and our corporation still wants their monthly dos. We are struggling and can only imagen how the smaller center feel. As we have only been open for a month we are unsure of what will hold for us once September hits if we cannot increase our enrollment. We do not want to have to close our doors are families are so worried that they will have to start over and this is most definitely not a time for that.

Capacity alignment will not only allow us to serve more families safely, it will ensure that more centers remain economically viable and maintain quality. Most importantly, it will allow our programs to compensate educators fairly and meet the highest quality standards at the same level of our public and independent school counterparts. It will give children across the state the same access to best practice. Moreover, it will prevent another wave of closures this fall.

Frankly, with less than a month until September, any further delay puts the Department of Early Education and Care's successful re-opening, stabilization and strategic planning efforts at risk. If the capacity requirements are not aligned, programs will cut important services. In fact, we are one of countless programs that will not be able to remain open because of this regulatory inconsistency, inequity and unnecessary bureaucratic delay.

Given that these guidelines were made available to DESE in June and the science continues to support the recommendations, we hope you can prioritize the timely release to the EEC community so we can prepare for September just as elementary, secondary and higher education have.

Over the summer, we have demonstrated that we are ready and able to serve children. Now, if we could have the increased capacity guidelines, EEC programs and parents can plan to sustain the vital work of educating our youngest citizens and meet the Commonwealth's educational goals.

We thank you for your consideration, your commitment to the field and your support of our work. We look forward to getting the aligned guidelines for increased capacity so that we can continue to serve children well.

Sincerely,

Courtney O'Rourke and Maribel Vilchis
The Learning Experience Chelmsford, MA

Preschool Academy/Kimberly Higgins

Dear Board Chair Lesaux and members of the Board,

Thank you for this opportunity to share my thoughts with the Board. My name is Kimberly Higgins and I run a preschool licensed for 49 students in Winchester, MA. I am writing today with two requests:

1.) To request that guidelines and requirements for September be released as soon as possible. We cannot staff or enroll in the current unknown. I am in a difficult position as I lose funds monthly while families are inquiring about enrollment, but I have no space for them until updated guidelines are released.

2.) As funding becomes available, please consider making these funds available through grants to programs that are enrolled with private families as well. Preschools across the state need support, not just those in low-income regions. QRIS, the MA Quality Rating System for childcare, was a well thought out plan. We were scheduled to have our observation to obtain Level 3 just before the closure. We have worked hard on the quality of our program (staff qualifications, space, materials, etc.) to obtain that level. Please consider using this already-in-place system to establish how funds are distributed.

Thank you,
Kimberly Higgins