

Name/Organization	Topic/Comments
<p><b>Clare Higgins</b> Executive Director, Community Action Pioneer Valley</p> <p>and</p> <p><b>Anat Weisenfreund</b> Director of Head Start and Early Learning Programs, &amp; President, Massachusetts Association for Infant Mental Health</p>	<p><b>Topic</b> – Recruitment and retention of early educators, and comments on child care financing</p> <p><b>TESTIMONY SUBMITTED TO THE BOARD OF EARLY EDUCATION AND CARE NOVEMBER 8, 2022</b></p> <p>Thank you Chair Lesaux, and members of the Board of Early Education and Care for the opportunity to speak with you today, along with many others, about the critical importance of elevating and fairly allocating subsidy rates, based on the true cost of care, for early educators in all Regions of the Commonwealth. Our early educators are skilled and devoted essential workers, serving a most critical role in ensuring the healthy development of the Commonwealth’s youngest, and often most vulnerable, children.</p> <p>We are writing as the Executive Director of Community Action Pioneer Valley, and as the Director of our Head Start and Early Learning Programs in Western Massachusetts, where since 1966 we have served low-income children and families through our high quality, robust subsidized child care and Head Start programs. Our service area is 6.2% of the state’s population, within 1,550 square miles or about 22% of the state’s land mass. When we are fully staffed, our program provides early education and care through Head Start/Early Head Start and EEC funding for 438 families with infants, toddlers, and preschoolers throughout our region in both centers and family child care homes. Our Agency offers excellent benefits, and our program provides educators extensive training in relationship- and trauma-informed care, reflective supervision, and other opportunities for growth.</p> <p>Recruiting and retaining qualified early education professionals has always been a challenge due to poverty level wages, compounded by the complexity and emotional strain of this most important work - work which, essentially, is about supporting the emotional competencies in children that will support their school readiness for a lifetime. As you well know, the last years of the pandemic, coupled with rising inflation, have made a bad problem worse. Across the nation, early education and care staff are leaving their jobs en masse for higher paying and often less stressful opportunities. In our program alone, in the 2021-2022 school year, out of 51 educator positions across our full-day, full year sites, 37% left during the course of the year and as of mid-August 2022, 33% of these positions were vacant. Our vacancies have remained that high or higher through November, as we have been able to hire some educators but have simultaneously lost more staff. Among full-day, full-year staff surveyed this fall their top 4 priorities were in this order: Compensation &amp; Benefits; Mental Health; Strong Program-Family Relationships; Reduced Staff Turnover.</p> <p>What does “turnover” really mean in early education and care settings? The youngest children with very low incomes spend the bulk of their waking hours in early education and care settings, and our work, in trusting partnership with families, represents a huge protective factor for high-risk children. All development happens in the context of relationships, and it is the quality and consistency of early relationships that predict healthy social-emotional development, school readiness and so much more. Fundamentally what “turnover” means for children is the severing of bonds, again and again, creating significant disruptions to their emotional well-being and their school readiness. For children who may have already suffered multiple breaks in attachment in their young lives, the sudden loss of their teacher may be especially damaging. “Turnover” also impacts families, who have entrusted their child to the care of another: sudden and repeated losses create distrust and disengagement. And for staff, the repeated loss of their colleagues and teams represents not only the stressors of now being spread way, way too thin, but is deeply stressful and demoralizing. And this in turn threatens quality, emotionally responsive care: we all know that highly stressed, spread too thin, demoralized teachers are less able to fully engage with the emotional needs of children. These stressors compound the main stressor of not making a fair wage, causing yet more “turnover.” In the words of our staff:</p>

- “Compensation is important because staff turnover would lower, and that staff turnover is detrimental to the program.”
- “Compensation is huge and it impacts other areas like full enrollment and the mental health of the employees left behind---those that are doing multiple jobs to try and keep everything afloat. We are going above and beyond in most cases.”
- “I think if we can compensate in a way that reduces the staff turnover then people would not be stressed because we are doing multiple jobs....the bonuses are nice but sometimes feels like a small band-aid over a large wound.”
- “To earn what we deserve as Educators”
- “Close the gap towards employees making a living wage!”

Our personnel costs are 70% of our total budget. Our facilities and transportation costs are high because we don't benefit from the economies of scale that are achievable in larger communities with denser populations. While EEC's own preliminary data confirms a reasonably consistent cost to provide services across the state, highlighted by only a \$1.80 per day preschool cost differential across regions, the proposed rates actually increase the gap as demonstrated in the attached graphs. We simply don't have enough money to solve this problem and ultimately children pay the price.

Thank you for listening; thank you for your commitment to support the well-being of the youngest and most vulnerable children and their families in the Commonwealth. Thank you for recognizing our essential workers – the passionate and talented providers who every day create environments, relationships and curriculum that hold, nurture, educate and lift up infants, toddlers, preschoolers and their families. Please do all you can to ensure the sustainability and quality of our most important system of care. On behalf of children, families and those who care for them, please move to a cost-based reimbursement system, allocated fairly across the regions, and sufficient to make possible the most essential supports required by the children of the Commonwealth.

**Laura Perille**  
President & CEO,  
Nurtury Early Education

**Topic** – Child Care Financial Assistance (Subsidy) Rate Increase Proposal

Dear Chair Lesaux, Members of the Board, and Commissioner Kershaw:

I am sorry I cannot be at today's meeting in person, so I am submitting this testimony in writing and I hope you will have the opportunity to consider this input. I am honored to lead a large, mission-driven nonprofit child early education and care agency established in 1878 and today serving over 1,000 children and families in Boston neighborhoods and Greater Boston Communities including Cambridge, Chelsea, Everett, Revere, and Winthrop, among others. Nurtury Early Education offers both center-based child care for young children and supports a large and vibrant network of over 140 family child care providers through our family child care system. The majority of our families live or work in economically marginalized communities, have low incomes, and qualify for state subsidies for child care.

I want to acknowledge the work of the Commissioner and her team, as well as thoughtful questions from this board, leading to the revised subsidy rate proposal you are considering today. I also want to acknowledge the extraordinary focus on early education and leadership by the Legislature in approving the most substantial investment in early care and education that this Commonwealth has seen in decades, while pointing to important areas of future policy change through the Early Education Economic Review Commission report. While no doubt accelerated by the extreme stress that the pandemic placed on child care, this level of focus is a hopeful opportunity to *begin* to address the longstanding public funding inequities that existed well before the pandemic. These inequities have limited access to care for our youngest children and their many families from all walks of life who struggle with the high cost of care, while our workforce struggles with low rates of

pay especially compared to their K-12 peers. Collectively, we have much work still to do in the Commonwealth.

For our part, Nurtury Early Education has worked hard over the past three years to invest in our workforce because it is the right thing to do and in order to meet our mission for children and families. This has included raising our minimum wage from \$15 to \$18/hour between 2020 and 2022 along with annual increases for our current workforce, along with bonuses, increased professional development opportunities and staff support, and robust benefits. As a child care provider serving many marginalized families with state-funded subsidies, our ability to continue and *sustain* these investments is tightly linked to state funding levels and EEC subsidy rates.

The proposal before you represents substantial increases in sustainable funding for subsidy providers, and for this I am grateful, along with many of my fellow providers statewide. I want to speak, however, to the importance of the Board staying focused on the need to address longstanding inequities in the subsidy system in the coming year. I point in particular to the continued reliance on the Market Rate Study approach which produces wildly differential payment rates for different parts of the state. I would be remiss if I did not point out the unfairness and illogic of a statewide system that pays \$110.24 per day for an infant receiving care in Weston, \$105.25 per day for the same-age child in Boston, yet pays just \$72.37 for the same-age child attending child care in Holyoke in Western Mass or Fall River in Southeastern Mass, according to the new proposed rates. This market rate model does not encourage a high-quality statewide system – rather it creates a system of regional winners and losers. Pinned to private pay market rates in oddly drawn geographic regions, the rates do not represent any attempt to cover the true cost of care for child care providers and our early education workforce. Even with the proposed rate increases you are considering today, the gap across communities statewide actually widens. Nurtury is an early education provider agency operating in Region 6 and Region 4 – the two regions that benefit from the highest rates statewide – and I am here to tell you that it is not fair, it is not good for the field, and most importantly not equitably meeting the needs of children, families, and our workforce statewide. On its face, there can be no equitable justification for paying \$37.87 **more** per infant per day in Needham in Region 4 and \$32.88 more per infant per day in Boston in Region 6 compared to children in Region 1 in Western Mass. and Region 5 in Southeastern Massachusetts, where they will receive just \$72.37 per day (and only \$65.71 under the old rates).

I urge this board to make reform of our subsidy payment system a key focus of your work in the coming months and year. In particular, I urge you not to settle for a modest pace of proposed reforms, with the current recommendation pointing to the state's CCDF State Plan in Federal Fiscal Years 2025-28 for a revised payment approach. I urge this board to push for a new methodology by Fiscal Year 2024. While the federal Administration for Children & Families (ACF) does currently rely on the Market Rate Study, they also allow states to propose and use alternative methodologies including the cost of care. Massachusetts has been slow to take advantage of this opportunity, so it is imperative that we move boldly now – and that we work in collaboration with our federal delegation to advocate for the changes we need in the Commonwealth. While approving today's rate increases, I urge this board to continue to urge EEC and to encourage any future administration to move much more expediently to come up with an alternative methodology that provides equitable support to the child care sector statewide working to meet the needs of our most marginalized children, families, and communities.

Thank you again for considering these suggestions, offered in a spirit of collaboration. Please know that I deeply appreciate this work that we are all doing together to strengthen the equity, access and quality of early education and care for the benefit of children and families across our Commonwealth. On behalf of the early education workforce, , board members, family child care providers, and families of Nurtury Early Education, thank you for the work that you are doing.

Testimony for Nov. 8, 2022

EEC Board Meeting

Good Afternoon,

To begin, I would like to thank the Board for allowing us to testify on behalf of the Western Mass region. I have worked in the Early Education field for almost 30 years. Anyone that works in the field knows that you don't work in this field to get rich, you do it for the love of the children and their families that we serve each and every day for 52 weeks of the year.

Throughout the Pandemic I have been fortunate enough to work for the Valley Opportunity Council; a Non-Profit agency. VOC has worked extremely hard to keep our child care centers open while so many centers in the area have closed. Many of the closures were due to the fact that state subsidies for each child in Region 1 (Western Mass Inequity) are much lower than what Region 4 receives. Providers could not keep their lights on and their doors open. This in turn has limited child care slots and made it difficult for families to find care.

Providers work long very stressful days and many employers have not been able to give their people raises to help offset the rapidly rising costs to keep their families bills paid, food on the table, clothes on their backs and for many, their student loans paid each month. Many Early Educators have left the field which has caused centers to work short staffed, teachers having to take on extra responsibilities and unfortunately at times inconsistencies for the children. When you can work in retail or in another position and make more money with no higher education and less responsibilities why would people stay in the field?

Why do our long hours and hard work deserve less state subsidies than the teachers and children in the eastern part of the state? The amount of care and responsibilities are the same as we are all licensed by EEC. We are not talking a small percentage less. Please reconsider the division of funds so that our children and teachers are given the funds they need to continue to provide quality programs and education in our centers.

Thank You,  
Michelle Gregoire  
Teacher/Director  
VOC @ Sullivan School  
400 Jarvis Ave.  
Holyoke, Ma. 01040

*"A Classroom is four walls with our future inside"*

November 8, 2022

Good Afternoon EEC Board Members, Secretary Peyser, Commissioner Kershaw,

My name is Gillian Budine. I have been a Coordinated Family and Community Engagement (CFCE) grant program coordinator for many years, including during the Community Partnership and Family Network days. Locally we call our CFCE program the Community Network for Children (CNC) Program and our priority communities are Erving, Leverett, New Salem, Shutesbury and Wendell, but our programs reach families beyond those five towns to neighboring towns with our CFCE programming.

Today, I would like to speak to how CFCE programs meet the priorities of the CFCE grant: support families as their child's first teacher through the Ages and Stages Questionnaire developmental screenings, welcome baby visits, family outreach, literacy enrichment, family referrals to EI, basic needs support, child care; collaborate with private programs and public schools; support families in crisis, and more. CFCE programs have been a crucial hub of support and resources for families. Especially in our small rural communities. The options for early care and education programs for families to access have become more limited in our rural communities. With limited access to programs many families at home rely on CFCE programs to provide enrichment, socialization and opportunities to reduce isolation through trusted relationships with CFCE program staff.

CFCE programs are the local and trusted web of support, warm handoffs, builders of relationships and partners that can support EEC with family engagement and meeting the goals of the EEC's strategic plan. Please make sure to include CFCE's in this work. Engage the CFCE's in the work to strengthen our communities capacity to meet the needs of families.

As we strive to maintain and build capacity within our communities to engage and support families we recognize that we cannot do so without additional financial support. The CFCE grant has been reduced or level funded for the last nine years. Please ensure the web that supports and engages our families, programs and partners in our community can continue to be a strong and resilient EEC funded program.

As I end my testimony I would like to share a few comments from families participating in our CNC programs.

Thank you for taking the time to listen.

Sincerely,  
Gillian Budine  
Community Network for Children Program  
CFCE/ New Salem Wendell RSD  
201 Wendell Road  
New Salem, MA 01355  
[budine@erving.com](mailto:budine@erving.com)

**Comments from participants of the Community Network for Children Program (CNC) serving the small rural communities in Erving, Leverett, New Salem, Wendell and Shutesbury, with support from the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care Coordinated Family and Community Engagement Grant.**

**Submitted by Gillian Budine, CNC Program Coordinator**

**Nov 8, 2022**

*"Working with CNC has been incredible throughout the time we have been involved, from last trimester of pregnancy to current days of our daughter being 1. Our daughter has learned so much and is quite advanced as a result of this program and what it offers.*

*The staff is beyond amazing; from communication within the groups to one-on-one interactions. It truly feels as if they have made a difference in our lives, community and beyond.*

*That being said, it feels as if the world needs the ladies and their affiliates to continue making an incredible impact in today's world."*

*"My son and I have been attending CNC programs since he was a few months old. He now has such a fondness for music and stories. During the pandemic, we have been so grateful to have a self welcoming environment to attend, learn, and grow. Without the CNC programs, my son wouldn't of had the opportunity at his young age to listen to live guitar, singing as a group, read alouds, and exploration. Thank you for this incredible opportunity!"*

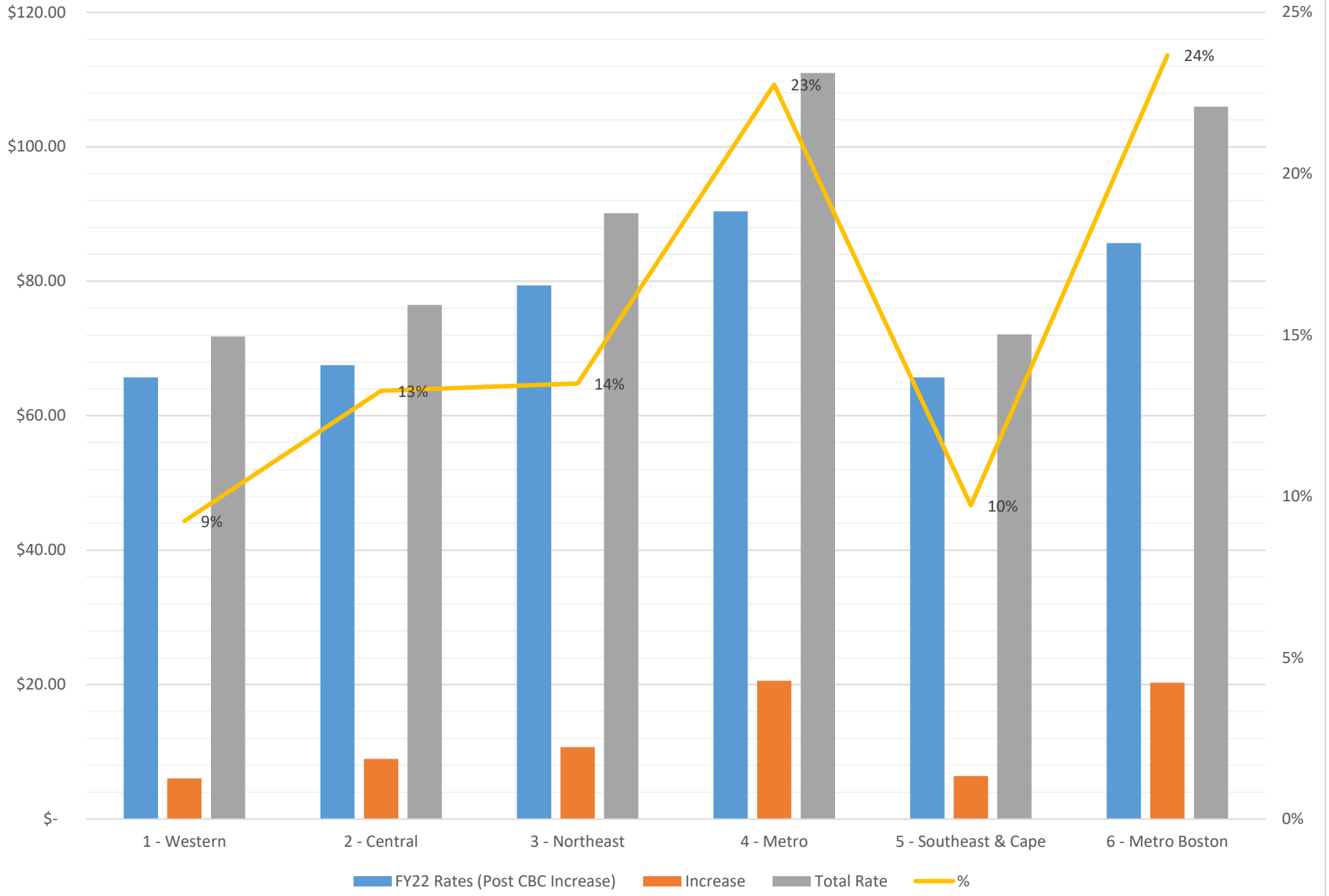
*"Without the CNC, my family would not have met some of our (now) closest friends, visited libraries in adjacent towns, and spoken with parents about issues we're experiencing so openly. The CNC has made me a part of the community and allowed me to help be part of it.*

*My family looks forward to the Families Connecting sessions. We always learn something and leave feeling refreshed and renewed."*

*"My daughter (16 month old) has started attending in-person story time events. Throughout Covid, our family has been very cautious and limited contact with others to keep our child safe. Since this is the first event she has been able to safely attend, she was a bit shy in the beginning. After three weeks, she has been feeling more comfortable and confident during the class, and it has been absolutely heartwarming to see her becoming more social with other little ones. I don't know what we would do without this incredible resource!"*

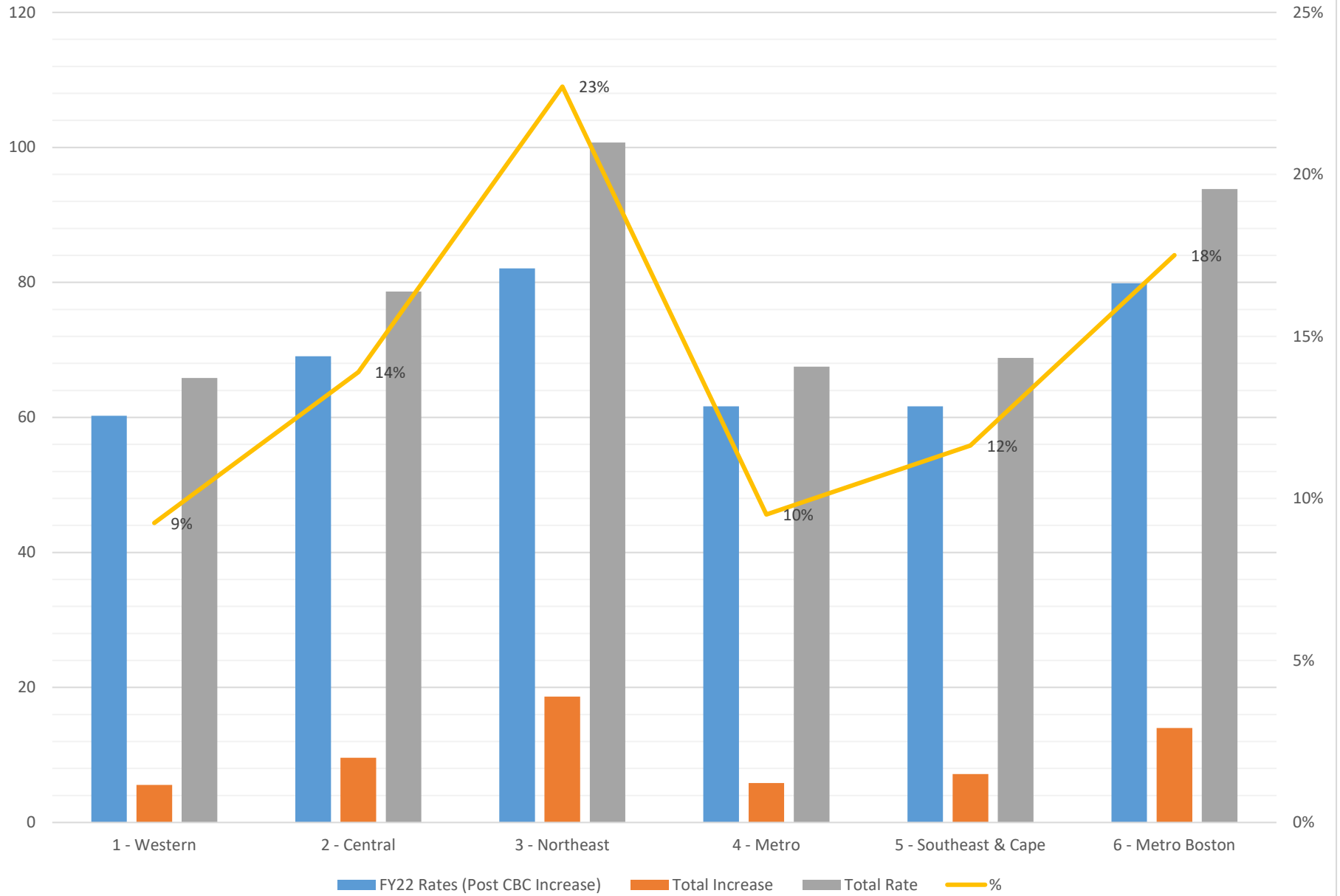
*"Our playgroups in Shutesbury and Erving have been of utmost importance in maintaining social connections and parental support throughout the pandemic, especially during the winter months. We have appreciated the efforts of all staff involved in planning, coordinating, and implementing these groups. My daughter lights up with excitement to see Ms. Katie play guitar and sing songs. She practices social skills of waving and taking turns when with her peers. She's developed a sense of pride and independence when giving supplies back to Ms. Gillian to help clean up. To see other parents has also helped give me support and comfort during these times of being in isolation throughout the cold months. Furthermore, Gillian is always willing to help support us with advice, items from the children's closet, and resources such as as the ASQ to help ensure our daughter's development is on track. Not only do these programs engage us, but they have ensured our physical and emotional well being as we've navigated the journey of becoming new parents. These programs have been invaluable to our family and we look forward to participating in many more in the future!"*

### Center Based Infant Rates





### Center Based Toddler Rates



# Center Based Preschool Rates

