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MTF Summary of the 2024 Early Education & Care Bill

An Act ensuring affordability, readiness and learning for our youth and driving economic development

On March 7th, [Senate Bill 2697](#), *An Act ensuring affordability, readiness and learning for our youth and driving economic development* was released from the Senate Committee on Ways and Means. Senators have until Monday, March 11th to review the legislation and file amendments, debate will be on Thursday, March 14th.

The Senate Bill:

- Codifies the Child Care Financial Assistance system.
- Makes permanent a Child Care Operational Grant program.
- Enhances workforce supports for early educators; codifying an early educator scholarship program and an educator loan forgiveness program, and creating a career ladder for early education and care educators.
- Includes a number of provisions intended to expand equitable access to early education and care; including an employer-supported child care pilot program, the prioritization of vulnerable populations throughout multiple programs, and focusing on expanding community partnerships.

MTF has prepared a comprehensive and accessible summary of the 2024 Senate bill, intended to offer a review of the bill's provisions, purpose, and impact. The summary includes:

- A high-level overview of the bill, including its recent legislative history.
- A breakdown of notable bill sections related to the Child Care Financial Assistance (CCFA) system, Child Care Operational Grants, the development of the child care workforce, and enhancing access to early education and care for families at all income levels.
- A detailed section-by-section excel summary of the legislation.

Legislative History

During the 2021 - 2022 legislative session, the Senate took action on its first version of an early education and care reform bill. The bill, *An Act to expand access to high-quality, affordable early education and care* ([S.2997](#)) was unanimously passed to be engrossed by the Senate on July 7, 2022. The House did not act on the bill during the 2021-2022 session.

The 2024 Senate Bill reflects many of the same proposals previously adopted by the Senate, including the codification of the state's Child Care Financial Assistance system and the establishment of a permanent Child Care Operational Grant Program. The bill also adds several new provisions, for example, a proposal to limit the fees paid by families eligible for CCFA's income-eligible program to no more than 7 percent of a family's total income.

On February 8th, the Joint Committee on Education favorably reported the bill ([S.2619](#)), which represented a new draft encompassing 22 pieces of legislation, to the Senate Committee on Ways and Means. Each of the earlier bills had previously received a legislative hearing from the Joint Committee on Education.

Bill Summary

Major topics of the bill include:

- **Child Care Financial Assistance** – The bill codifies the state’s Child Care Financial Assistance system in state law and makes support of that system subject to appropriation. CCFA enables income-eligible families and families engaged with the Department of Children and Families and the Department of Transitional Assistance to afford and access high-quality early education and care through the use of vouchers or contracted slots with the department. The bill states that these reimbursements shall be made based on enrollment instead of daily attendance, and includes language that would systematically increase the income eligibility thresholds for care as additional state or federal resources become available.
- **Child Care Operational Grants** – The bill codifies a permanent operational grant program for child care providers into state law and makes the program subject to appropriation. The bill outlines a range of allowable uses for the grant program, as well as factors that the grant formula should consider, and eligibility requirements for participating providers. Notably, the bill goes further than the current grant program in requiring participating providers to be willing to serve children receiving CCFA and capping grant awards for certain providers who operate 10 or more facilities.
- **Child Care Workforce Development** – The bill includes several sections related to expanding and supporting the early education and care workforce, which codify a scholarship program for EEC educators, establish a loan forgiveness program for early education and care educators, and direct EEC to establish an early education and care career ladder. The bill also directs the department to conduct a study on enhancing the early education and care workforce pipeline.
- **Equitable Access to Care** – The bill addresses issues of equity, access, and affordability in several sections, including in those programs outlined above. This bill also includes several provisions that would evaluate and pilot strategies to expand access to care for families at all income levels, including:
 - The establishment of a matching grant pilot program for Massachusetts employers to support early education and care for their employees.
 - A legislative report from EEC which studies and makes recommendations on employer-supported early education and care benefits.
 - An assessment of the current supply of slots for, and the unmet needs of, families whose income is less than 125 percent of state median income.
 - The creation of a plan by EEC to expand local partnerships, including strategies and resources necessary to address community-based program expansion.

The four tables below highlight specific sections of the bill related to Child Care Financial Assistance, Child Care Operational Grants, Child Care Workforce Development and Equitable Access to Care.

Child Care Financial Assistance

Bill Section	Description	State Fiscal Impact?
8	Codifies the state’s CCFA system, including programs that guarantee assistance to families involved with the DCF and DTA, and provide care to families that are income-eligible. Income-eligible assistance is available for families whose income is not more than 85 percent of the state median income (SMI), with priority given to families whose income is less than 50 percent SMI, families in which a parent or guardian works in the EEC field, families experiencing homelessness, and other groups. If additional funds are available from the state or federal government, the bill outlines additional tiers of prioritization based on income-level up to a maximum of income of 125% of SMI.	Subject to appropriation.

Child Care Operational Grants

Bill Section	Description	State Fiscal Impact?
11	<p>Codifies a permanent operational grant program for child care providers. The bill specifies that the grant formula shall give preference to providers that serve high numbers of children receiving CCFA, high numbers of high-needs children, and other unique populations.</p> <p>The bill includes several eligibility requirements including that providers must comply with an early education and care career ladder established by the department, and that providers must continue to or demonstrate a willingness to enroll children receiving CCFA to be eligible for the program.</p> <p>The bill includes further regulations for providers that are not non-profit corporations and operate more than 10 center-based programs. Under the bill, providers that fall into this category shall not receive more than 1 percent of the annual appropriation to the program, unless granted a waiver by the department.</p> <p>Finally, the bill outlines annual reporting requirements for the department related to the program.</p>	Subject to appropriation.

Child Care Workforce Development

Bill Section	Description	State Fiscal Impact?
1	<p>Directs the Board of Higher Education to establish an early education and care educator scholarship program for EEC educators where scholarship funds may be used to cover the costs of tuition, fees, or course-related expenses, including personal child care costs. Recipients shall be current or prospective educators in the EEC field.</p> <p>Directs the Board of Higher Education to establish an early education and care loan forgiveness program for educators in the field. Preference will be given to educators who work in communities serving high-needs children and those who work in regions with a shortage of child care slots.</p>	Subject to appropriation.
11	Establishes an early education and care career ladder which shall include minimum recommended salaries for early education and care educators and staff, commensurate with the salaries of public school teachers. The career ladder will also include minimum recommended benefits for staff and recommendations for linking professional development and credentials to increased compensation and leadership opportunities for educators.	None.
14	Directs EEC to conduct a study and report on enhancing the early education and care workforce pipeline. The report shall include recommendations on recruiting new providers, developing apprenticeship programs, opportunities for collaboration with vocational schools, and exploring the growth of FCC providers into center-based providers.	None.

Equitable Access to Care

Bill Section	Description	State Fiscal Impact?
13	Establishes a matching grant pilot program for Massachusetts employers to provide early education and care for their employees. Participating employers would commit to investing at least 50% of the expected cost to establish a new program to provide employee child care or expand seats reserved for employees at an existing provider. Participating providers must commit to enrolling children receiving CCFA and must also be non-profits or family-based providers.	Subject to appropriation.
15	Directs the Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development, EEC, and the Executive Office of Economic Development to file a report which studies and makes recommendations on employer-supported early education and care benefits.	None.
16	Directs EEC to file a report assessing the current supply of slots for, and the unmet needs of, families in need of EEC services whose family income is less than 125 percent of SMI, considering differences in geographic regions.	None.
20	Directs EEC to submit a report to the Legislature on a plan to expand local partnerships including strategies and resources necessary to address community-based program expansion plans currently in development through the Commonwealth Preschool Partnership Initiative program.	None.