

It's Time We Lean In Together To Solve The Child Care Crisis

Massachusetts is at its best when we come together to achieve big things. Education and health care reform, same sex marriage, and protections for gender identity and expression are just several recent examples of the Commonwealth's ability to boldly lead – with huge social and economic benefits for all – with the collaboration of public and private sector leaders.

Now we have an opportunity to do it again by placing high-quality early care and education at the center of the "Future of Work" agenda.

We have a once in a generation opportunity to shape the workplace. And we must. Re-shaping child care is necessary to support the workforce necessary for the Massachusetts economy to recover and reach new heights.

Attracting and retaining a talented workforce always will be the lifeblood of Massachusetts employers, and current labor market conditions raise many red flags. During the pandemic, labor force participation in Massachusetts went down more than two times the national rate according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The Pew Research Center found that the share of U.S. women who are working was the lowest in 35 years and job losses have been concentrated among industries populated by women and BIPOC populations. Job growth data in August was disappointing despite the high demand for labor. Among the chief explanations for this paradox: working families, especially mothers, are sidelined by caregiving responsibilities and a lack of affordable, high-quality child care options.

We know that Massachusetts employers and families are deeply concerned about the adverse impacts of the child care shortage. According to a statewide survey of Massachusetts employers conducted during the pandemic, 91% reported significant or some concern expressed by employees about child care and school issues, and 76% expressed concern about the stability and career growth opportunities of women. A Beacon Research survey of families with young children affirms these concerns: 79% of parents are worried they will not be able to work without formal child care arrangements, while 76% indicated concern that their quality of work will suffer.

This underscores why the Massachusetts Business Coalition for Early Childhood Education was launched this past February and now includes 78 companies employing more than 225,000 workers in Massachusetts as well as 19 business associations, and is still growing (visit the Coalition website at <https://www.maroundtable.com/mbcece/> to learn more and join us). Our goal is for Massachusetts employees and employers to



thrive by helping to establish a world-class system of early childhood education that is accessible, affordable, high-quality, reliable and sustainable regardless of race, income or neighborhood. We recognize that the "Future of Work" must mean re-shaping the public-private system of early care and education in a way that positions Massachusetts as a global leader in attracting and retaining talented workers with young children.

How could we place child care at the center of the "Future of Work?" Employers could start by challenging the comfortable fiction that the system is working well enough for enough families – it wasn't and it isn't – and engaging with each other and their employees to share ideas on what will make work sustainable and manageable for workers and their families.

What could this new future look like? It could include innovative benefits, like subsidy assistance for working parents, tax credits for working families or employers offering subsidies, and strong, quality-controlled resource and referral networks to connect employers and employees with local child care providers. It could be supported by public policies, similar to those used to promote health care coverage and transportation assistance, to make employee supports more achievable for employers of all sizes and industries. It could include new financing models that more equitably and sustainably distribute the costs for paying for and providing child care, shifting some of the burden from families and long-struggling child care businesses, who largely shoulder it alone today. Any of these steps, independently or in combination,

would help support the creation of quality child care options that are more accessible and reliable for families, and more predictable and productive for employers who need top talent today and tomorrow. Finally, we could learn much from innovative state, national and international models – like the U.S. military's child care program – that are demonstrating success in bridging child care gaps.

When it comes to solving the child care crisis, the future is now. Business leaders in every corner of the state and every industry have a stake in solving the child care crisis for their current workforce, and their workforce of the future.

Massachusetts achieves great things when we lean forward together. Child care is the future of work and the time is now to make it our next great achievement.



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