



Informational Hearing on Early Education and Care  
Joint Committee on Education  
Thursday, September 14<sup>th</sup>, State House Room B-2

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Chairman Lewis, Chairwoman Garlick, and Members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to participate in this informational hearing on early education and care. My name is JD Chesloff and I am President & CEO of the Massachusetts Business Roundtable.

Before I begin, I just want to take a moment to acknowledge and thank you for the historic, astounding and game-changing attention and commitments this Committee and both branches have made to early childhood education over the past few years. Our good friends at the Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation tell me that early childhood funding in the state budget has increased by 136% in the last five years and has more than doubled since pre-pandemic. You have heard this field, you have taken action, and you have responded, and I just want to be sure to recognize that and thank you.

At the Roundtable, an organization of more than 90 CEOs and Senior Executives from large employers across the Commonwealth, our policy agenda centers on the state's competitiveness with a particular focus on the recruitment, retention, development and diversity of the state's talent pool...our chief competitive advantage. High-quality, affordable and accessible childcare enables people, primarily women and caregivers, to participate in the workforce, while helping to address the dire challenge facing employers that have been unable to find workers to fill open jobs.

As many of you know, the Roundtable - and I - have been at this for years. I wanted to take a few minutes to identify what I consider four important inflection points over that time regarding business engagement in early childhood that have led us to where we are today.

First, Tom and I both worked at Strategies for Children earlier in our careers, and when I was there, we began to implement strategies to engage employers. At the time, our primary message centered around research showing benefits to the child: increased graduation rates, lower rates of incarceration, and higher rates of college

participation, etc. as a result of participation in high quality early education and care programs. Employers responded to this data, but not in a significant way. While they understood and supported the issue, a five-year-old was still twenty years away from meaningfully participating in the workforce. However, Strategies for Children's intentional focus on engaging employers in early childhood advocacy I believe was an important inflection point in getting to where we are today. It was a start. That was twenty years ago.

The next inflection point came in 2017, when then Speaker Robert DeLeo convened the Early Education and Care Business Advisory Group. This group of business association leaders, myself included, were challenged to look at early education and care as a workforce issue. The focus became more about early education as an enabler that allows people to work. At the time, the communication between employer and employee regarding childcare needs was minimal, with families deeming it their issue to address without a great deal of employer involvement. The Advisory Group's seminal report began to change that narrative, acknowledging that the early education field was "in crisis," and making a series of recommendations to stabilize the system, develop a workforce development system for early childhood educators, and lay out a long-term vision for early childhood policy in the state. This helped to spark employer engagement and advocacy, both in public policy and in rethinking how they could support the childcare needs of their employees.

The third inflection point was the release of the report of the Early Education and Care Economic Review Commission in 2021. Both Tom and I served on that Commission, which I continue to consider a valuable and visionary framework for childcare in the Commonwealth. Under the leadership of Chairman Lewis and now Assistant Majority Leader Peisch, the Commission recommendations have led to hundreds of millions of dollars in new funding for the early childhood system and legislative proposals to implement the report's vision. The Legislature is to be commended for this commitment. Again, thank you.

As part of that report, we acknowledge that employers have a role to play, and the Roundtable has been fully supportive of the recommendation in the report that asks the business community "to identify and promote employer best practices and explore incentives for employers to support additional early education and care benefits for their employees." In fact, as Tom will discuss, we have a legislative proposal that responds to that charge.

The fourth inflection point was the creation of the Business Advisory Group for Early Childhood Education, which Tom leads and will discuss in a minute. This allowed the business community to organize itself in a way to meaningfully participate in these discussions and has advanced employer engagement in childcare policy to a new level.

The Roundtable has been advocating for investments in early childhood education for decades, believing it to be a business development issue, a workforce development issue, and a necessary component of the current and future competitiveness of the Commonwealth. In some ways, and now I believe we are at another, broader, inflection point. The legislature has clearly made childcare a priority, as has the Healey-Driscoll Administration, advocates have formed coalitions, the business community is mobilized, and we have a thoughtful framework for the future. I do believe that we will look back at this time as a critical moment in the evolution of childcare policy in this state, where we collectively committed to a system that addresses the needs of families, the early childhood workforce, and workers and their employers, and I am grateful that the business community has been invited to the table as a partner in these conversations.

The Legislature is showing incredible leadership and has made investments in recent years that are nothing short than breathtaking, and we look forward to the work ahead. We are grateful to be working in partnership with you on this, and now I'll turn it to Tom.

Thank you for your leadership and collaboration.