

PORTLAND WORKS FOR KIDS

Reimagining early care and education in Portland, Maine: A Policy Agenda

GOALS

We work to ensure high-quality early childhood care and education (ECE) programs are available and valued by families, employers, and legislators as vital to children's growth and development, a successful economy, and vibrant communities. We also work to ensure that the regulatory and governmental systems and structures are in place provide for ECE's financial stability, the professional development of their teams, and their ability to access needed resources and supports.

URGENT POLICY PRIORITIES

- Support local, state, and federal policy efforts to address the child care workforce crisis
- Ensure that the child care subsidy program is:
 - Available completely online
 - Supported with linguistically and culturally appropriate outreach and application processes, particularly for marginalized families, families of color, and those who are multiple language learners
 - Available to all income eligible families regardless of citizenship status
- Support policy efforts to address the lack of early intervention and special education providers
 - Enhance early intervention efforts that provide classroom-based instructional strategies and supports for children with developmental delays and/or disabilities within general education (child care) classroom settings
 - Ensure consistency between the federal TANF/FedCAP child care subsidies and Child Care Subsidy Program regarding special education reimbursement rates
- Support efforts to conduct state and county-specific studies on availability (including by age), affordability, accessibility, and true cost of quality care

SYSTEM BUILDING POLICY PRIORITIES

- Support policy efforts which would enable and provide incentives to private businesses to invest in employee benefits related to child care
- Expand the use of TANF dollars to increase the reach of Child Care and Development Block Grant
- Enhance coordination between ECE programs and elementary schools regarding kindergarten transitions
- Develop comprehensive, single integrated early childhood budget
- Create an Early Childhood cabinet-level position in state government
- Support federal legislation/funding to ensure that no family pays more than 7% of their gross income on child care expenses
- Support paid family and medical leave to care for the birth or adoption of a child or to care for sick family member
- Strengthen the tax code to provide relief for working families who struggle with the cost of child care, including making the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit refundable
- Restructure the Child Care Subsidy program in Maine to include all families and all child care programs. Every family has access to a subsidy (that subsidy is tiered by income), and in turn child care programs have subsidy reimbursement payments that reflect the cost of care and pay equity with elementary educators
- Ensure strategic financing for local systems capacity and quality
 - Develop and employ diverse and enact alternative funding mechanisms to provide sustainable income for early care and education
- Leverage current resources to establish a comprehensive child care resource and referral system
 - To work with local businesses and track the availability of providers, help with the recruitment and development of new programs and provide consumer information to parents about finding quality, accessible, affordable child care
 - To establish data systems to monitor access, enrollment, quality, and strategic investments for meeting community needs
 - To include community coordinated support for families, such as: securing child care, home visiting, developmental screening and special education services

