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Child Care in Maine

A Report to the 123rd Maine Legislature



Maine Child Care Advisory Council

**Members of the Child Care
Advisory Council 2007**

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Representative Deb Simpson
Senator Nancy Sullivan
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Tracye Fortin, Maine Head Start
Directors Association
Carolyn Drugge, Early Childhood
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Laura Harper, Maine Women's Lobby
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Linda Elias, Maine Resource
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Allyson Dean, Maine Roads to
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Sheila Youmans, MaineSchool Age
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Ruth Burke, Maine Family Child Care
Association
Ann O'Brien, Children's Behavioral
Health
Kristen Bowker, Parent
Representative
Sarah Blackman, Parent
Representative



Maine Child Care Advisory Council

January 2008

**Senator Joseph Brannigan
Representative Anne Perry
Co-Chairs, Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human
Services
123rd Maine Legislature**

Dear Senator Brannigan and Representative Perry:

On behalf of Maine's Child Care Advisory Council we are pleased to present our annual report and recommendations to the 123rd Maine Legislature. As you will see in this report, the Council has chosen to prioritize the unification of state child care subsidy policy and systems as its primary recommendation for the upcoming year. This public policy agenda item was first articulated by the Commission to Develop a Strategic Priorities Plan for Maine's Young Children and our Council strongly supports this action item for the coming year.

The Child Care Advisory Council stands ready to assist you in any efforts to move this agenda item forward in the best interest of children, families, and state government in Maine.

Thank you for your consideration. Please contact us with any questions you may have regarding this report.

Sincerely,

**Lori Freid Moses
Co-Chair, CCAC**

**Kristen Bowker
Co-Chair, CCAC**

2007 Child Care Advisory Council Focus Areas:

In 2007 the Child Care Advisory Council, through its recommendations, chose to focus on the following critical early care and education policy areas:

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- **Helping Maine Families Pay for Child Care**
- **Improving the Quality all of Early Care and Education Programs in Maine**
- **Increasing the Supply of Quality Early Care and Education Programs**

The following data outlines our accomplishments to date, as well as opportunities for further investment in Maine's early care and education system.

Helping Maine Families Pay for Child Care

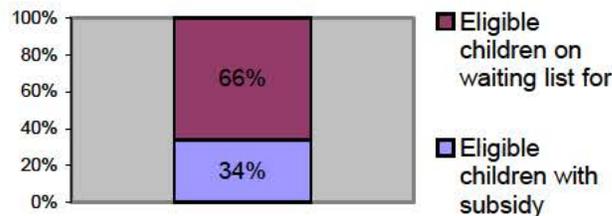
\$37,759 – Livable wage of one working parent with two children

\$7,803 (20% of livable wage) – Cost of one child in day care

\$14,412 (38% of livable wage) – Cost of two children in day care

The Maine Center for Economic Policy reports that Maine's "livable wage" for a family of three in Maine, with one working parent and two children in child care is \$37,759, or three-quarters of Maine's median income. In comparison, the average cost for full-time infant care in a child care center was \$7,803 – more than 20% of this family's income. If the second child is preschool age, the additional child care cost, estimate at \$6,609, would take the total cost for child care to almost 38% of the family's livable wage.¹ Additionally, even those families who qualify for subsidy to help offset the cost of child care cannot always access a subsidy because of waiting lists. Despite the investment of federal and state dollars, Maine's subsidies reach only 34% of the children who are eligible.

**Availability of Child Care Subsidy
December 2007**



¹ Early Care and Education in Maine, 2007 and Beyond, Maine Child Care Advisory Council

This year the Child Care Advisory Council worked closely with the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to manage the transfer of vouchers into one administrative office – the Office of Integrated Access and Support. This represented a huge change in the way that vouchers have been managed in the past for families, and the Child Care Advisory Council provided input to the Department toward making this transition as seamless as possible for families. In addition the Council assisted in modifying the subsidy policy manuals into one consistent document to aide a smooth transition to centralized voucher management. Ultimately the goal of this transition is to insure efficiency in the delivery of subsidy to families and to redirect administrative funds to direct service delivery thus increasing the capacity of the subsidy system to help more families pay for child care.

Improving the Quality of all Early Care and Education Programs in Maine

Since 2006 DHHS has led a process whereby parents, providers and other stakeholders have engaged in the development of the standards and the rating system.

Quality for ME is the state of Maine’s voluntary four-step Quality Rating System designed to; increase awareness of the basic standards of early care and education, to recognize and support providers who are providing care above and beyond those standards, and to educate the community of the benefits of higher quality care. Since 2006 DHHS has led a process whereby parents, providers and other stakeholders have engaged in the development of the standards and the rating system. During 2007, 69 providers in southern and western Maine participated in a pilot study of the proposed rating system.

The purpose of this pilot was to:

- Revise the standards as necessary
- Develop and test monitoring and reporting processes.

On site observations and various interviews/surveys were conducted in order to describe characteristics of different settings at each of the four steps. Observations of the pilot sites were conducted using the Environmental Rating Scales (ERS)². Based on a range of one to seven, a score of five is considered a “good” score on this scale. The following table indicates the percentage of pilot sites with scores of 5 (good) or better at three of the four steps:

Step One (n=31)	29% had total scores of 5 or higher
Step Two (n=10)	26% had total scores of 5 or higher
Step Three (n=3)	44% had total scores of 5 or higher

² Harmes, T., Clifford, R., Cryer, D., 2006. Environmental Rating Scales

These scores are similar to data collected in Maine's Cost Quality Studies of 2004³ where environmental rating scales were also used to measure quality. In the findings from this 2004 study:

30% of family child care homes (n=90) had total scores of 5 or higher
29% of preschool classroom (n=71) settings had total scores of 5 or higher

The 2006 QRS pilot data is similar to the earlier 2004 study findings in that the majority of child care settings did not meet a "good" (5 or higher) benchmark of quality. The need for an investment in quality is very clear.

Maine's quality rating system is such an investment. This quality rating system will measure quality across eight standards including:

Maine Quality Rating System Standards

1. Licensing status and compliance history;
2. Learning environment;
3. Program evaluation;
4. Staffing and professional development;
5. Administrative policies and procedures;
6. Family involvement;
7. Family resources; and
8. An authentic assessment of children's development.

The quality rating system embeds early learning guidelines created for our state, as well as training developed by Maine Roads to Quality and the Maine's Resource Development Centers. By utilizing these existing investments in quality, Maine is maximizing and targeting existing resources, rather than creating a system that requires new investments of funding given the fiscal challenges currently faced by the state of Maine.

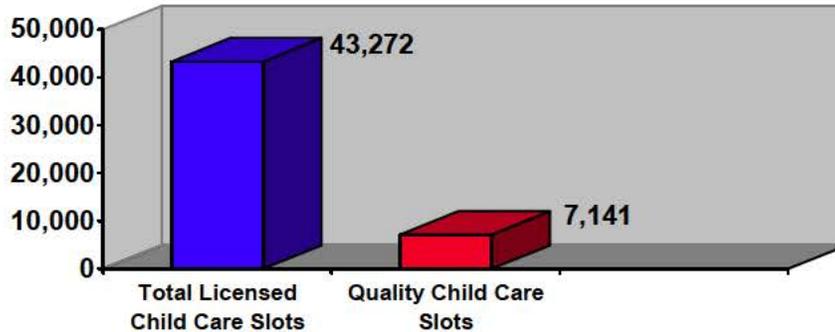
The Child Care Advisory Council has worked in partnership with DHHS toward the design of Quality for ME. Early in 2007, the Council formed a subcommittee to provide guidance to the department regarding the implementation of a quality rating system in Maine. The group has met monthly for a year, to provide feedback throughout the pilot phase of this initiative, and has helped to shape the final standards contained in this system. By creating a system that is reflective of the needs of providers, while also advocating for high standards of quality, the Child Care Advisory Council's work supports the implementation of a system that will improve the quality of care that Maine's families can access.

³ Marshall, N. Creps, C., Burstein, N. Roberts, J., Dennehy, J. Robeson, W., Glanz, F., 2004. *The Cost and Quality of Full Day, Year-round, Early Care and Education in Maine: Preschool Classrooms*.

Increasing the Supply of Quality Early Care and Education Programs

There are 281 settings, serving 7,141 children/youth with a current Quality Certificate

Number of Quality Certificate Child Care Slots in Maine
November 2007



According to information collected in November 2007 from the state DHHS licensing files, Maine Roads to Quality, and data collected by Maine's Resource Development Centers, there are 281 settings, serving 7,141 children/youth, with a current Quality Certificate. Given that the total licensed capacity for all providers as of November 2007 was 43,272, only 17% of all licensed slots in Maine are in settings that meet the DHHS definition of quality care.

Through the work of the Infrastructure subcommittee, and in concert with the Department of Health and Human Services, the Council has begun the work of studying realignment of resources and services toward a more efficient delivery of child care subsidy and quality supports in Maine. In addition this group has also begun to look at how the current investment of state resources aligns with the greatest need in Maine. Making sure that the state's investment is tied to the highest quality of care is critical to insuring the highest return on our public investment in child care subsidy.

In addition, the work of the Council in support of the design and implementation of the quality rating system represents our belief that systemic investment in programs at each step of the quality rating scale will ultimately increase the ability of providers to deliver a higher quality of care. As the number of providers joining the quality rating system increases and programs are given support toward program improvement, the number of children served in high quality settings will also increase.

The Child Care Advisory Council offers the following recommendation to the Legislature for the 2008 session:

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Unify State Child Care Subsidy Policies and Systems.

The Child Care Advisory Council recommends that the Department of Health and Human Services unify the policies governing subsidies provided via Federal Child Care Block Grant and those provided under Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program to increase incentives for quality child care.

Accomplishing this unification supports all three areas of focus for the council:

Helping Maine families Pay for Child Care

Unifying the state child care subsidy policies and systems simplifies this program for families accessing a subsidy. One set of regulations and policies to govern these two systems is critical to families understanding eligibility, successfully accessing this system, and allowing the state to evaluate the usage and quality of child care accessed through the subsidy system. In addition bringing these two funding streams together under one office will allow for more efficient administration of these funds. Increasing efficiencies allows for a greater percentage of funding to be used for direct service and the delivery of subsidy to more families.

Improving the Quality of all Early Care and Education Programs in Maine.

We know that the provision of high quality child care for children under age five is a smart investment, bringing returns estimated from \$7 - \$16 dollars saved for every \$1 invested.⁴ Unification of the child care subsidy systems allows the state to set consistent quality standards for programs providing care to Maine's families. Simply put - the higher the quality of the early intervention, the greater the return on investment.

The ability to set quality standards across all programs serving children in the subsidy system assures that Maine's investment in its child care subsidy system is solidly placed in those programs committed to providing high quality care for Maine's children. The Quality for ME program will provide information that will assist parents, child care providers and policy makers in identifying existing needs toward improving the quality of child care settings across Maine. Providers who voluntarily participate in the Quality for ME program will be measured against standards of quality and provided technical assistance in a targeted manner to assist them in improving quality. Providers will be able

⁴Early Care and Education in Maine, 2007 and Beyond, Maine Child Care Advisory Council

to market their quality level to families and can demonstrate quality improvement over time. Most importantly, Maine families will have access to consistent information about what constitutes high quality child care. If providers in their area are participating in the Quality Rating System, parents can use that information to select the best quality care available.

Increasing the Supply of Quality Early Care and Education Programs

Unification of the child care subsidy system allows the state to fully implement the Quality Rating System in Maine.

Tying a provider's ability to receive subsidy to participation in the Quality for ME system will increase the supply of quality child care offered to these families. This will be accomplished first by increasing an incentive to providers to participate in the program which offers supports toward quality improvement, and second by simplifying the choices for families with regard to selecting a child care provider. If a family utilizing a subsidy is given clear information about a child care's quality through a rating by this system, they are better equipped to make an informed decision about their choice of a child care provider. Similarly, by providing the state with accurate data about the quality of child care available to those families who qualify for subsidize child care, the Quality Rating System data offers the state a powerful tool to use in determining where to invest its limited resources.

Finally, the consumer interest in the quality rating of a child care provider will offer a powerful incentive for child care providers to participate in Maine's Quality Rating System as parents have the information they need to choose a child care setting by its level of quality, in addition to cost and location. Adding a clear measure of quality to the array of characteristics that parents consider when choosing a child care setting gives providers an incentive to join the Quality Rating System and ultimately to receive the support they need to achieve and maintain high quality services.