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October 17, 2023

Joint Committee on Education  
Sen. Jason Lewis & Rep. Denise Garlick, Chairs

**SUPPORT FOR H.489 & S.301**  
**Increasing Access to Affordable Early Education and Care**

The ACLU of Massachusetts strongly supports H.489 and S.301, *An Act providing affordable and accessible high quality early education and care to promote child development and well-being and support the economy in the Commonwealth*. This legislation is a critical measure to begin to overcome significant racial disparities in early education and care that drive inequality for Massachusetts families today and will – left unaddressed – perpetuate and compound educational and economic inequality in the next generation.

The ACLU's work to protect and expand civil liberties and civil rights includes a century-long commitment to racial justice and extensive work to eradicate inequalities in education, from advocacy in the courts and the legislature for fair school funding formulas to successful efforts to improve student access to educational services by reforming school discipline and exclusion laws.

We support this legislation as part of that same mission, because access to high quality, affordable early education and care are foundational for equitable opportunity throughout a child's education. Unfortunately, educational inequities begin in the earliest years. When young children miss out on the learning environment, structure, and stability of early childhood education and care, they are more likely to be ill-prepared to begin school, which contributes to educational marginalization, disparities in discipline and criminalization, and overall achievement gaps.

Research by the Center for American Progress shows that a lack of access to quality childcare magnifies racial inequities and inhibits young people's ability to gain access to better school, life, and work outcomes.<sup>1</sup> In Massachusetts, where enormous racial disparities in economic stability are painfully well documented<sup>2</sup>, improving access to high-quality early education and childcare must be

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<sup>1</sup> John Halpin, Karl Agne, and Margie Omero, "Affordable Child Care and Early Learning for All Families," Center for American Progress, Sept. 13, 2018, <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/early-childhood/reports/2018/09/13/457470/affordable-child-care-early-learning-families/>

<sup>2</sup> An oft-cited 2015 study by the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston demonstrated appalling economic disparities along lines of race in Massachusetts. It showed that the median net worth of Greater Boston households was \$247,500, but merely \$3,020 for Puerto Rican households, and an eye-popping \$8 for Black households. According to the study, the financial well-being of the growing population of color in Boston is integral to ensuring inclusive long-term growth and prosperity is inclusive in the area. These disparities are a first-order public policy problem requiring immediate attention.

part of the solution. Quality childcare not only benefits children's long-term educational success; it is also critical for the economic wellbeing of their families, their communities, and the entire state.

The Common Start legislative framework uses a combination of direct-to-provider operational funding and family financial assistance to reduce costs to families while compensating providers for the actual cost of providing quality care. It will provide financial support to low-income families to enable their young children to receive early education and care, simultaneously freeing up parents to seek new employment and earning opportunities and increase their family's overall financial stability. It will help create good-paying early care and education jobs, which means not only higher quality childcare but also stability for workers and job growth in a vital sector of the Massachusetts economy. And it will directly offset provider operating costs, which can enable childcare centers to open and operate in the communities that need them most.

We applaud the \$1.5 billion investment the Legislature made for early education and childcare in the FY24 budget. With this substantial investment, the Commonwealth now has the opportunity to build upon a solid foundation. Yet in a state that has the 2nd highest cost of childcare in the nation, further action is critical. The Legislature must enact these reforms to provide adequate and meaningful resources for preschool education and ensure that all children, especially children of color and low-income children, receive a just, equitable, and excellent education. It's time for the Commonwealth to support a comprehensive childcare system for working families.

Thank you for your consideration. We urge you to report H.489 and S.301 out of committee favorably.