

January 11, 2021

To: Governor Baker

Cc: Secretary Peyser, Secretary Sudders, Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy, Commissioner Riley, Commissioner Bharel

Subject: Access to Publicly Funded Covid-19 Screen Testing Must Immediately be Made Available to Early Education and Care and After-School Programs, Staff, and Children

Together, collectively representing more than 200 early education and care and out-of-school time providers, advocates, and associations, we write in response to Friday's announcement that the early education and care and after-school sector will not be eligible to participate in the weekly Covid-19 pool testing program designed for K-12 schools, staff, and students.

The announcement that K-12 will be receiving publicly funded weekly testing is indeed welcome news; but, the exclusion of early education and care and after-school providers from this program is unconscionable. If there are funds available for weekly, preventative Covid-19 testing for K-12 educators, there are funds available for us.

The Commonwealth cannot continue to deny early education and care and afterschool staff, students, and families the critical health and safety supports provided to K-12 schools.

We remind you that early education and care and after-school providers have been at work, serving children in-person since the first days of the pandemic. We remind you that you have deemed us essential workers and that you have noted repeatedly that we are foundational to Massachusetts' post-pandemic recovery.

Clearly, we are not essential enough to benefit from the same health and safety measures meant to protect the lives and wellbeing of our K-12 brothers and sisters who care for the same families that we do.

For months, early educators and after-school providers have been sounding the alarm that increased access to Covid-19 testing is necessary for protecting the health of our workforce and of the children and families we serve. For months, we have been calling for increased public funds - any public funds, for that matter - to prioritize our access to rapid-result symptomatic testing and to make it possible for us to participate in preventative testing protocols such as the one you outlined last week.

We continue to be ignored. At the end of the day, this is a statement about whose lives matter and whose do not.

Ignoring the basic health and safety needs of the early education and care and after-school sector during this pandemic is not without precedent. When the field called out for meaningful and sustained help to procure personal protective equipment, pleas for public assistance fell on deaf ears. Requiring our programs to bear the full cost of protecting the health and safety of our workforce and the children we serve is the reason Massachusetts is losing significant percentages of its early education and care providers. We can no longer afford to both keep our workforce safe and keep our doors open.

As we look upon the next few months knowing that the Covid-19 transmission rate is going to continue to rise, failure to make testing available to our programs will mean more of us will close, leaving more families without the care solutions they need and more young children without the early education they deserve.

Through the pandemic, we have shown up for the children and families of Massachusetts. We have put ourselves on the front lines, so that no family in Massachusetts is asked to choose between caring for their child and keeping the job that puts food on their tables. And so, we ask you: When will Massachusetts show up for us?

Access to weekly preventative Covid-19 testing must be made available to early education and after-school care providers immediately.

Sincerely,

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