Maine Child Care Advisory Council: Report to the 126th Maine State Legislature

January 16, 2014

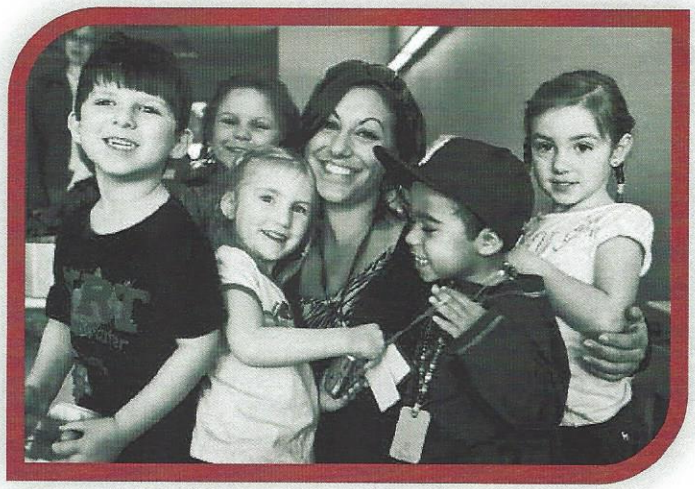
Honorable Members of the Maine 126th Second Legislature
Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333-0100

Dear Committee Members:

We are pleased to present this annual report of the activities of Maine's Child Care Advisory Council from July 1, 2012 to June 30, 2013. The Child Care Advisory Council (the Council) has three legislatively-mandated duties:

- To advise Maine's Legislature and the Department of Health and Human Services (the Department) regarding child care services in the state;
- To encourage the development of coordinated policies among state agencies that promote quality, consistency, and efficiency in child care services;
- To facilitate community input on child care issues through communication with state government, the Legislature, service providers, and the public.

The Council's work focuses primarily on child care subsidy, effective licensing regulations, and professional development supports for the child care workforce. These components of Maine's early childhood system are funded by the Child Care Development Fund (CCDF), one of the largest sources of funding supporting young children and their families in Maine. Federal dollars comprise 80% of the over $20 million in annual funding, with the State providing the required 20% match in funds.



The following are highlights of the Council's work during the fiscal year of 2013:

- The Council advised the Department regarding the elimination of the waitlist for CCDF subsidy funds for families. As of October 2013, the waiting list for subsidy has been eliminated.

- The Council provided guidance to the Department during the request for proposals (RFP) process for a newly-created Professional Development Network (PDN), charged with providing resources and professional development opportunities to the early childhood workforce.
- The Council contributed feedback to the Department regarding updating policies for programs enrolled with the state's quality rating and improvement system, called *Quality for ME*.

The Council continues to represent the key stakeholders of the early childhood system in Maine, acting as a resource for the Department and the Legislature. Parents, child care providers, and other community members are always given the opportunity to bring concerns and recommendations to the Council for discussion. We hope this brief report of our activities will be helpful to you as you consider the needs of Maine's families in the coming year.

Sincerely,

Kathy Colfer, Co-Chair
Maine Child Care Advisory Council

Judy Reidt-Parker, Co-Chair
Maine Child Care Advisory Council

Child Care Advisory Council Areas of Focus for 2014

- Revisions to *Quality for ME* will begin in 2014, pending the selection of a contractor for the work. The Council will monitor the revisions and provide feedback to the Department regarding the experience for child care programs, families, and children.
- The Council will consider recommending changes to Maine's child care licensing regulations to better reflect current research on child development and to align regulations with potential revisions to the *Quality for ME* standards.
- The Council will continue to focus on child care subsidy policies. Attention will be given to how policies affect families accessing subsidy as well as the programs caring for children in low-income households.

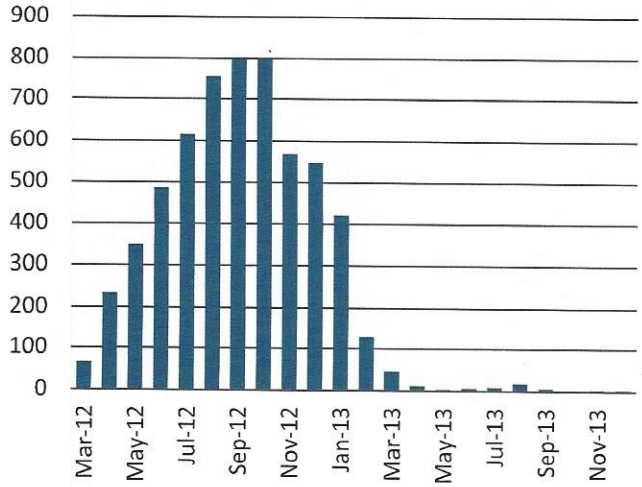
Child Care Subsidy

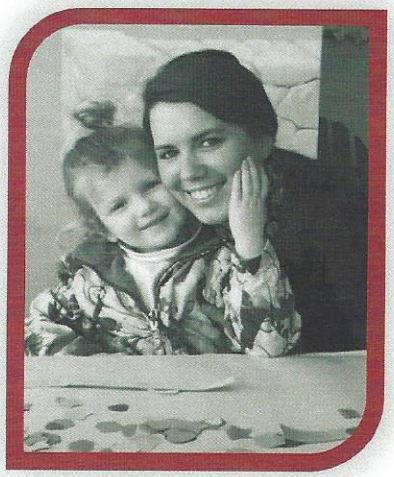
The CCDF child care subsidy is an essential tool for helping families increase their financial stability and independence. Guidelines for the program include:

- Parents must be working, in job training, or attending school.
- The annual family income cannot exceed 85% of the State median income.
- Subsidies are provided on a sliding scale, with parents paying a percentage of the child care fees based on their annual income.
- Parents can choose to access care from a child care center, a family child care home, or from a family, friend, or neighbor.
- Payment rates to providers are established annually and based on a market rate study.

In 2012, the number of families served by CCDF subsidies decreased. A waitlist of over 800 eligible children developed, primarily due to a change in how the Department administered subsidies, which created a backlog of applications. In 2013 the Department began efforts to dissolve the waitlist. The Council received monthly reports from the Department, which demonstrated a steady increase in the number of families accessing subsidy. As of December 2013, the waitlist had been reduced to fewer than 5 children (Table 1).

Table 1
Children on the Waitlist for CCDF Subsidy, by Month





Megan's Story

"Being a single mom of a four-year-old, I have learned very quickly that nothing comes easily. For everything Hayden needs in life, I have worked hard to get it," says Megan.

When Megan was just 17 years old, she found out she was pregnant. She completed both her junior and senior year of high school in one year, knowing that she needed at least a high school diploma to get a good job to support herself and her child.

After graduating high school, Megan started at Kennebec Valley Community College and enrolled Hayden at a child care facility rated at a Step 4 with *Quality for ME.*

"During everything I went through, Hayden's teachers were always there, not only to support her, but to also support me. Her teachers have become a family away from home for us. I feel very fortunate that the child care subsidy program helped with child care costs for Hayden. It allowed me to work and go to school."

Maine's Child Care Professional Development System

The Department released a request for proposals (RFP) in 2012 for a Professional Development Network (PDN). The goal of the PDN is to have one main contact for practitioners to access resources and professional development opportunities.

The PDN contract was awarded to Maine Roads to Quality, which is housed at the University of Southern Maine's Muskie School of Public Service. The work of the new PDN began in January of 2013.

During its first year of operation, the PDN has reported the following accomplishments:

- Implementation of a new Trainer Quality Assurance System (TQAS) for all PDN-delivered training to ensure high-quality instruction and fidelity to training content;
- Development of a Maine Director Credential for child care center directors and revision of the Child Care Leadership Institute series (I, II, and newly-created III);
- Design of a series of online trainings called "Stepping Up with *Quality for ME*" to help programs increase their Step on Maine's quality rating and improvement system;
- Delivery of 37 trainings throughout the state, reaching 421 individual providers who accumulated a total of 11,757 contact hours of instruction;
- Launch of a statewide, coordinated technical assistance program offering support to programs ranging from phone conversations to on-site collaborative consultation.

Tammy's Story

"[My mom and I] first began taking classes at Central Maine Community College to earn our Child Development Associate credentials shortly after opening Mammy's Childcare and Preschool in 1996. In 2002, we joined the Maine Roads to Quality Registry to begin tracking our professional development.

"Maine Roads to Quality has supported us with technical assistance and advice, along with financial support in the form of grants to meet accreditation standards outlined by the National Association of Family Child Care (NAFCC) or by helping to pay the fees required by the accreditation process. We joined a cohort of providers that came together either in person or by phone to share our experiences working through NAFCC's self-study process. This contact with other providers was instrumental in helping us work through all the standards and expectations.

"Maine Roads to Quality has offered multiple inexpensive trainings that my staff and I have taken to improve our work with children and families. Maine Roads to Quality has also awarded me a scholarship to help me return to school and earn my Associate's Degree in Early Childhood Education. From there, they have continued to support me with another scholarship as I currently work toward a Bachelor's Degree in Early Childhood Education."

Quality for ME: Maine's Quality Rating and Improvement System

Since 2008, Maine has had a quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) for child care programs, called *Quality for ME*. This voluntary system has three goals:

- To recognize programs that provide quality care;
- To encourage programs to increase their level of quality;
- To give parents identifiable standards of quality.

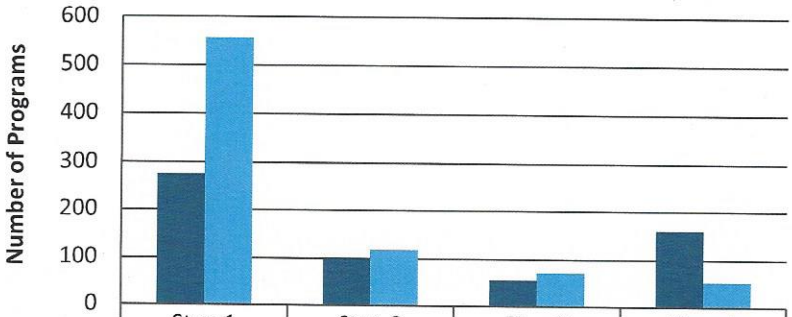
Quality for ME consists of four Steps and addresses eight standard areas, including:

- Licensing compliance
- Learning environment and developmentally appropriate practice
- Program evaluation
- Staffing and professional development
- Administrative policies and procedures
- Parent and family involvement
- Family resources
- Authentic assessment.

The Step One standards require meeting basic licensing regulations. Each remaining Step builds upon these standards, with Step Four requiring accreditation from a nationally recognized organization.

From 2009-2011 the participation rate for *Quality for ME* nearly doubled, from 22 percent of licensed child care providers in 2009 to 40 percent enrolled in 2011. The reasons for this increased participation rate are a combination of policies and financial incentives for enrolling in and advancing with *Quality for ME*. However, as demonstrated in Table 2, there remains a need to support providers in advancing to higher Steps.

Table 2
***Quality for ME* Enrollment by Step**
January 2014



	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4
Child Care Centers	275	100	53	160
Family Child Care	555	117	70	51

Promoting increased child care quality is essential for the healthy development of Maine's children. Mediocre or poor quality care can have a detrimental effect on child

development.[1] While Maine's current licensing regulations ensure basic health and safety for children, they do not fully encompass all professionally established and evidence-based quality standards for child care programs.

In 2013, the Council reviewed concerns from providers regarding professional development standards contained in *Quality for ME* and provided feedback to the Department for establishing criteria for approving national accrediting bodies for inclusion in Step 4 of *Quality for ME*.

Future work for the Department includes revising the *Quality for ME* standards to align with current national research and responding to feedback from the child care field in Maine. Additional work includes ensuring the provision of sufficient technical assistance and financial support for providers seeking to increase their Step rating.

Sheena's Story

"This fall I took the Child Care Leadership I course with [Maine Roads to Quality]. I gained an abundance of resources and ideas that we have already put into action [at my program]. It was so beneficial to converse with other leaders and discuss the policies and procedures at their centers.

"My director and I are currently taking the online training "Stepping Up with *Quality for ME*." Now we have new handbooks, curriculum, evaluation sheets, surveys, and so much more as a result of the partnership between my center and Maine Roads to Quality. I can confidently say that we are moving in the best positive direction. This project has become my passion, and thanks to Maine Roads to Quality, I have just what I need to head down the path for accreditation."

[1] Neugebauer, R. "Cost Quality Study Findings Unveiled," Child Care Information Exchange, vol. 3/95