



## Creation, Development and 5-years of Maine's Right from the Start Coalition

[rightfromthestartmaine.org](http://rightfromthestartmaine.org)

### FORMATION

In late 2015/early 2016 the Maine Early Childhood Funders Group, approached the three leading advocates for early care and education in Maine (Rita Furlow with Maine Children's Alliance, Kim Russell with Council for a Strong America Maine and Rick McCarthy with Eaton Peabody Consulting, which, at that time, represented the Maine Head Start Directors Association, the Maine YMCA Alliance and the Maine Community Action Programs) to come together and create a statewide coalition that could position itself to have impact in early care and education policy and funding. Working in partnership with the funders throughout 2016, we honed this scope of work.

We all knew that Maine's early childhood system was in crisis, and thus we needed to add and grow programs and services for children and families. We were in the last two years of conservative Maine Governor Paul LePage's term. The LePage administration dismantled services, structures, and policies that were previously model components of early care and education. Thus, the initial goal was to create a broad-based, bi-partisan and diverse coalition whose members could create and execute a public and policymaker education effort focused on the large field of 2018 gubernatorial candidates, with the ultimate goal of electing an ECE champion to the Blaine House, as well as additional champions in both legislative chambers.

We created the Right from the Start Coalition (RFTS) with the mission *to create comprehensive early care and education systems that include an integrated continuum of policies, investments, programs and services within and across early learning, family engagement and health to ensure every family has the opportunity to succeed in our modern world.* From there, RFTS developed an advocacy model that focuses on the comprehensive systems impacting the quality of early learning experiences for all Maine children, by creating and enabling environments in four areas: political will, advocacy capacity, policy priorities and strategies, and endorsing partners.

### GROWTH

Early on, we told the funders that a critical missing voice on this proposed leadership team was the voice of child care providers and families. Thus, we collectively reached out to the Maine Association for the Education of Young Children, which, at the time, was run by an all-volunteer board made up of early childhood professionals working full time in child care programs and



schools. By January 2017 the funders capitalized the hire of MaineAEYC's first Executive Director Tara Williams.

RFTS leaders have recruited 46 organizations from across Maine's 16 counties to join the Coalition, representing a wide diversity of members and political views – from Maine's teachers' union, the Maine Education Association, and its more than 23,000 teachers, to the Maine State Chamber of Commerce and its more than 5,000 business members, to regional groups like Faith Linking in Action, a faith-based group in Maine's second largest community focused on serving families in poverty, to social justice organizations like Maine Center for Economic Policy and Maine Equal Justice Partners. RFTS Coalition members put their differences aside to come together with the common goal of better serving Maine's youngest children and their families.

#### **EARLY POLICY AND ADVOCACY WORK**

The RFTS leadership hired a professional polling firm to poll specifically on ECE issues in the fall of 2017. Simultaneously during 2017 RFTS leadership drafted the core documents that were vetted and revised by the full Coalition to become the RFTS white paper and memo on executive actions to present to each of the gubernatorial candidates. From February-June 2018 the Coalition leadership organized and executed meetings with 11 of Maine's then 14 gubernatorial candidates. (The other 3 candidates did not respond to multiple outreaches asking for meetings.)

At the same time, the RFTS leadership team worked with ECE legislative champions to launch the Maine Children's Caucus in January 2017. Maine's Children's Caucus, which is bi-cameral and bi-partisan, was then the sixth such Children's Caucus in the nation. The Caucus serves as a major educational forum for Maine legislators, a third of whom are freshman every session due to Maine's term limits. Over the course of five years, the Maine Children's Caucus has hosted 35 sessions. Example presentations include the Return on Investment (ROI) by national economist Rob Grunewald from the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, brain science presentations from the Harvard Center for the Developing Child's scientists, panels of Maine child care providers, and panels of state and local officials and child care directors discussing how Maine's opioid epidemic is impacting our youngest children. Each year the Children's Caucus also reviews all pending ECE legislation.\*



## **PANDEMIC YEAR & A RENEWED AGENDA**

Sadly, in 2020 we lost our partner Rick at Eaton Peabody Consulting to cancer. While navigating loss and change, and increased urgency in our work during COVID-19, the RFTS leadership partners brainstormed how to better engage our partners and hone our scopes of work. We created a committee/working group structure that played to each leader's and organization's strengths: MaineAEYC manages the Coalition's grassroots recruiting, education and engagements; Council for a Strong America manages the Coalition's earned media and grasstops recruiting, education and engagement; and Maine Children's Alliance manages the Coalition's state policy and state data/research functions.

The working groups and the full coalition met in later 2020 to discuss and develop RFTS goals for 2021. Working together and building from our 2017-2020 policy agenda, the RFTS coalition identified four cornerstones of public policy priorities for the coming year: 1) Early Learning and Care; 2) Family Supports and Services; 3) Workforce Advancement; and 4) Financing and Data Collection (see next page). We brought the four cornerstones together into two priority bills (see pages 5-6 of this document).

We are currently working on these priorities through five **key strategies** of the RFTS coalition:

- I. Administrative and Legislative Policy and Advocacy
- II. Policymaker Education
- III. Grasstops Engagement and Grassroots Engagement of Parents and ECE Professionals
- IV. Communications Strategy (earned media and social media)
- V. Building/Strengthening the Right from the Start Coalition



## 2021 Policy Agenda

*“Building healthy kids, strong families, and skilled educators”*

**MAINE’S FUTURE PROSPERITY** depends on every one of our children getting what they need to learn, grow, thrive, and become the adults who will strengthen our communities and build our economy.

**OUR SHARED VISION:** Every child in Maine will have access to high quality early care and education by 2030.

### **POLICY FRAMEWORK**

The Right from the Start coalition is a broad and diverse statewide network of organizations that work to ensure that all Maine children have the opportunity to succeed by raising both the public’s and lawmakers’ understanding, awareness and support for investing in early childhood care and education. Because a strong foundation early in life is critical to future health, productivity, and success, we work collaboratively to build and maintain the four cornerstones necessary for a strong early childhood system.

#### **CORNERSTONE: EARLY LEARNING & CARE**

**Vision:** Families with infants, toddlers, and preschoolers should have access to high quality early care and education that is delivered through partnerships with child care programs, including Head Start, home visitors, and school systems, with support from employers and community providers.

**Policy Objective:** Support legislation, funding, and executive actions to grow high-quality community-based partnership models for early care and education

**Policy Overview:** Integration of First4ME, EHS Partnerships, and other administration initiatives

#### **CORNERSTONE: FAMILY SUPPORTS & SERVICES**

**Vision:** Maine’s early childhood system requires regional coordination and connection, with no wrong door for families to access services.

**Policy Objective:** Support development of Help ME Grow model Policy

**Overview:** Support families to access and navigate services

#### **CORNERSTONE: WORKFORCE ADVANCEMENT**

**Vision:** The early childhood workforce should be integrated and valued as a vital part of Maine’s education system, with competitive wages and benefits on par with public schools.

**Policy Objective:** Improve Compensation for Early Childhood Education Workforce

**Policy Overview:** Wage Supplements along with scholarships for higher education, apprenticeships, and CTE support to build ECE career pathways

**CORNERSTONE: FINANCING & DATA COLLECTION**

**Vision:** Maine's early childhood system should function as a public good with dedicated funding.

**Policy Objective:** Improve Data Collection, Sharing, and Tracking, Develop System with Coordinated Funding

**Policy Overview:** Early Childhood Integrated Data System (ECIDS), and blend and braid funding across systems



## A BROKEN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION SYSTEM

The pandemic has been devastating to families and businesses all across Maine. It has shed a bright light on the need for a child care system that keeps working parents on the job and provides children with the building blocks for healthy physical, cognitive, and social/emotional development. Maine's child care system needs a strong foundation to grow and support thriving communities. We can all now see how many sectors of Maine's economy rely on access to child care for working families. If parents do not have child care, they cannot go to work.

Maine has been focused on the immediate child care crisis. We need to address the urgent needs, while also focusing on the long time cracks in the foundation. We can recover and build our child care system by

- 1) coordinating and growing early care and education statewide;**
- 2) investing in our early childhood workforce;**
- 3) supporting families in finding and navigating child care and early childhood services;**
- 4) improving data collection, reporting, and system enhancements.**



**SENATE  
PRESIDENT  
JACKSON'S  
BILL**

is foundational to building access to high quality child care within an early childhood system that has regional coordination and no wrong door for families to access services.



**FAMILIES** gain support and access to child care, home visiting, early intervention, and developmental screening to improve positive parent-child relationships, family health, well-being and financial stability.

**CHILDREN** gain access to high quality child care that supports all domains of learning and healthy child development.

Maine's **COMMUNITIES** and **ECONOMY** gain today and in the future with working families that can fully participate in their employment.

**Making the Case for Investment in  
Early Care and Education**

- Even before COVID-19 Maine families struggled to find child care. The number of family child care programs in Maine has decreased by 37% in the past decade.
- A critical period for children's learning and growth occurs in the first five years, when the brain is most flexible.
- Economists prove that for every \$1 invested in strengthening early learning opportunities, there is a \$7-\$12 return on our investment

**HOUSE  
SPEAKER  
FECTEAU'S  
BILL**

is foundational to building an early childhood system that can function as a public good with dedicated funding and a child care workforce valued as a vital part of Maine's education system.



Award **SALARY SUPPLEMENTS** to early childhood educators working in child care programs on a tiered scale that rewards experiences, credentials, and degrees earned.

Expand early childhood education programs at **CAREER** and **TECHNICAL EDUCATION** centers.

Increase **APPRENTICESHIPS** in licensed Maine child care programs.

Provide comprehensive **SCHOLARSHIPS** toward the attainment of an early childhood education associate or bachelor's degree that allows the person working in a licensed child care program to be supported in their higher education journey and graduate without student debt

**Maine Early Childhood Workforce Data**

- The median wage for early educators working in Maine child care programs is \$12.89 per hour, which is \$26,811 annually.
- Maine early educators working in child care with a bachelor's degree are paid 25 percent less than their colleagues in the K-8 system.
- The poverty rate for early educators in Maine is 16.5 percent, much higher than Maine workers in general (9.4 percent) and 8.3 times as high as K-8 teachers (2 percent).