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Good Afternoon.

On behalf of my YMCA colleagues across the commonwealth, thank you for inviting me to share our experiences over the last few months with you.

In my role at the YMCA I am responsible for all youth development programs at our 6 locations – everything from early education programs and aquatics to teens and afterschool programs. I also manage a YMCA branch in Worcester and also work for YMCA of the YUSA out of Chicago, supporting Ys across the country with their food programs.

My testimony today will bounce back and forth between the larger Commonwealth perspective of the YMCA – with 28 Associations across the state (which accounts for over 700 locations) and the YMCA of Central Massachusetts. And when I say Central Massachusetts – our geography is broad. We serve communities from Fitchburg to Southbridge to Worcester and Westborough. Our service area is not only broad – but diverse, in every way – and we have a distinct perspective as we have Centers who are nearly 95% subsidized and others that are nearly all private pay. Navigating the COVID-19 crisis and now the re-opening of child care has been challenging in different ways for both of these populations and speaks to the complexity of the issues at hand.

The YMCA is the largest collective early education, after school and camp provider in the state. We serve about 500,000 children under the age of 18. Prior to the pandemic we had 24,000 employees. We are one of the largest employers in Massachusetts, on par with Partners Healthcare. The majority of that staff are youth workers, early educators, camp counselors and out-of-school time professionals. We are well-organized and benefit from a multitude of shared services. I was never so happy to work for this organization as I was when the state shut down. We immediately banded together to face the COVID-19 crisis.

Massachusetts YMCAs operated 50 Emergency Child Care sites – half the children served through Emergency Child Care were in YMCA programs. From Cape Cod to the

North Shore to Springfield and everywhere in between, YMCAs overwhelmingly stepped up to provide emergency child care.

There's been a lot of discussion around capacity and utilization. It certainly was a moving target and full of nuances. Programs at the Cape had 3% utilization, Springfield nearly 40%, the North Shore and Taunton were as high as 98% and my own YMCA was always between 70-90% utilization. What we don't often hear about - is that really speaks to attendance. For example, 3 of our 4 programs were full with a wait list, every day (not right when we opened in March – but by April). Parents were nervous, confused and panicked. They wanted to hoard and save spots because they were trying to figure out work schedules and child care. Managing enrollment and wait lists, calling parents who had a spot, but didn't show up, only to beg us to save it and then show up the next day – was a full time job.

We are more than grateful for the subsidy payments – including parent fees – that continued through this time – we'd also respectfully ask that they continue through the end of the calendar year. That money, however necessary during emergency child care, was meant to keep the system going so we could re-open and remain viable. The cost of Emergency Child Care was staggering. It was something we knew going in – but were committed to providing care for our communities, so we took on the task and “absorbed the cost.” We estimate, conservatively, that we lost \$30,000 per month, per site. With 4 sites, over 3 and a half months – that's nearly \$450,000. We are fortunate in Central MA to have access to philanthropic dollars – and I will say the charitable community stepped up significantly. However, without it, we wouldn't have been able to financially sustain the emergency care programs much longer.

Every day, while providing emergency child care, we were also focused on our communities and families. Just because the state and the Ys shut down, didn't mean the needs of our families stopped. Food insecurity is one of the most pressing concerns of our time. When there is no school, there is no food. Tackling that, while providing emergency care, and trying to help families navigate on-line learning, not to mention mental health supports for teens and weekly/daily communication with our early ed. and OST families consumed our limited staff's time. I appreciate that we're focused in this hearing on the system of early education and care and how it supports communities, but as I know you're all aware, nothing happens in a vacuum and providers like the YMCAs are typically the most connected to families and their day-to-day needs and struggles – which puts more of a burden on our systems and resources and is why we need to part of the solution & planning moving forward.

From the minute we shut down.... we were planning for re-opening. While we didn't know what the guidance or standards would dictate, we knew we were working through something new and unprecedented and we immediately began to develop best practices. What worked, what didn't work (with staffing, parent communication, social distancing, staff training and motivation) – you name it – all emergency child care providers were learning to fly the plane....while we were in mid-air.

Re-opening has been a different challenge. In the last 2 weeks the YMCA of Central MA has opened 8 summer programs – no small feat. 5 licensed through EEC and 3 through DPH (and while I know this is an EEC conversation I would be remiss not to say – that child care IS camp in the summer. That YMCAs (and other providers) across the Commonwealth manage BOTH systems in the summer – and it's daunting. Two sets of standards and operating procedures, different entities with local Boards of Health for camps – we are at everyone's mercy as we try to re-open and manage the ever-changing guidance and varying interpretations.

Capacity is an issue. Central MA is in crisis. I believe Kim Dion spoke to this point in last week's hearing. There are more children than slots. Last summer we had over 1100 children in summer programs every day.... This summer our capacity is less than 500. This is solely based on space per child. It's only week one or two for our programs and we aren't at capacity enrollment or attendance (yet) – but we are over 60% ATTENDED and we anticipate by next week we'll be full with a wait list.

Which is what looms in front of us for the coming school year. Other programs have closed for good, unable to re-open, our own capacity is cut in half (one site had a 200 child capacity last summer, this summer it's down to 100 children and we had to use MORE space to even reach that number) and we don't know how to plan for the Fall.

We've already been faced with the tough decisions – we were full in March when the state shut down, then we developed relationships with ECC families who want to stay with us through the summer, but we don't even have room for all our other families. How do we choose?

As the largest providers of child care with a mixed funding stream, the answer is even more complicated. Do we cater to the private pay families who can afford the increased costs of child care? What about the families that are struggling more financially post-COVID and need the YMCA and the privately raised financial assistance we provide? Will we have enough and can we offer them care? And then what about the subsidized families who we know out-number our slots – and are often the most vulnerable of families. Do we give them priority? Not to mention the 100s of families stuck in the

middle. They make just enough NOT to qualify for subsidy, they have to return to work, costs have gone up, AND spots are limited. These are the questions we wrestle with (one phone call at a time, sometime 20 phone calls a day), as we re-open.

We understand that re-opening is fraught with the unknown.

Financially it's all about increased staff costs (cleaning, breaks, screening, subs, etc.) and the cost of maintaining a facility in this new normal. Everything from new classroom layout to cleaning supplies and PPE – you have no idea the amount of soap, hand sanitizer, and masks you need to get through one week of an all-day summer program.

Staff are exhausted. Emergency Child Care was hard. Summer programs, under these circumstances are still hard. We had no time between shut down and emergency child care, and then no time between emergency child care and re-opening.

What we want most, as we think about what's ahead of us, is time. We want to be included in a solutions-based conversation – and this is hearing today is a great start.

Early Education and Care and Out of School care is a private business... that serves a public need. Never was it more evident than during this COVID crisis that they are necessary to operate the Commonwealth (I think the Commissioner called it the backbone that supports the community). But the system is breaking and we need to work together to fix and re-imagine it.

We know the school year is coming and it won't look like it has in years past. We also know that parents won't be able to mirror their work schedules to fit a hybrid school schedule. We hope to work with EEC, DESE and our school districts to create a plan together that provides for the education and safety of children – every day. Our communities are going to need us now more than ever and YMCAs in Massachusetts are completely invested in the success of early education and care & out-of-school time programs.

A final comment on Transportation.... in its current state it's beyond cost-prohibitive. As an example, 60 children on a bus (last summer) is now reduced to 10. The cost of a bus is \$13,500, so to transport the same number of children this summer would cost \$81,000. One small example of the new reality we're all facing.

I won't reiterate Claire's final comments related to funding – they were spot on.

Thank you again for your time today and the opportunity to share the YMCAs thoughts and experiences.