

Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
SB 637: Children - Therapeutic Nursery Program - Funding
February 19, 2020
Support

The Arc Maryland is the largest statewide advocacy organization dedicated to the rights and quality of life of children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families. We support SB637 in that it will provide needed and predictable funding for therapeutic nursery services. These are lifeline services utilized by many families throughout Maryland so they have a safe, nurturing, and supportive environment for their children with special healthcare needs. The program allows families to continue to work and contribute to our robust economy and children to receive the early intervention services to which they are not only entitled, but that they desperately need to survive and thrive.

Federal and state law mandates that young children with disabilities shall receive early intervention services in the natural environment, and special education services in the least restrictive environment. This means, to the extent possible, every child should receive services alongside his or her peers without disabilities. Separate education should only occur if success cannot be achieved with appropriate services and supports in a less restrictive setting.

Currently, the Maryland State Department of Education partners, through the Medically Fragile Children Birth to Five grant, with five organizations in the state to provide medically-based child care and early education services to children with medical diagnoses and those who have developmental delays, physical disabilities, and behavioral issues requiring specialized care. The Arc Montgomery County is one of the organizations that receives this grant funding and uses the funding to run its inclusive infant and childcare program. The program is a model not only in our state, but in our country, for how children with and without these special healthcare needs can and should receive quality childcare together. In The Arc Montgomery County program, all children benefit from the ratios of care and individualized approach.

SB 637 seeks to mandate and increase funding for the therapeutic nursery programs that currently receive funding through the Medically Fragile Children Birth to Five grant. This mandate is critical when we consider that the grant program has not been predictably funded and cost of living increases have been hit or miss over the years. No business can operate without a certain measure of predictability and we hope SB637 will create this measure to keep these programs vibrant and in place.

As The Arc is committed to creating a world of inclusion, we would also like to see preference in funding through this program to go to organizations with goals to increase inclusion. Research shows that children with and without disabilities

experience positive outcomes when students with disabilities are educated alongside their typically developing peers, yet 23.4% of Maryland’s preschool children are in separate classes and schools.ⁱ The “blueprint” for the future educational success of Maryland’s children should begin early in childcare and with the message that we are all better when we are together.

Respectfully submitted,
Ande Kolp
Executive Director

ⁱ *Moving Maryland Forward: Elevating Maryland’s Birth to Kindergarten System of Services for Young Children with Disabilities and their Families*. MSDE. January 2020.