



March 1, 2021

**Testimony Concerning HB 1307: Oppose
Education – Child Care Centers and Youth Development Organizations and Programs**

Submitted to the Senate Education, Health and Environmental Affairs

I am writing to you today on behalf of Greenbelt Children's Center located in Prince George's County.

Our program is nationally accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children. We are Level 5, highest quality, in MD EXCELS. We have been licensed for 31 years and employ 15 staff who live in Prince George's County. **I strongly oppose HB 1307, even with amendments made.**

A childcare license is not just a piece of paper. It means a provider meets basic standards for health and safety, including fire inspections; it means expectations of training and qualifications; it means this is a profession, staff must meet standards of education and experience. Licensure is part of Maryland's efforts at expanding access to quality childcare, not something to hide from.

Every day that hard work is undermined when we allow unlicensed providers to carry out services. This legislation will weaken Maryland's strong position on this issue. HB 1307 would create an exemption for certain program providers as "emergency" legislation. This is not the emergency that needs attention.

We should not be in the business of creating a loophole for someone to operate without a license. The public health crisis and economic crisis have presented enormous challenges, but this is not the time to roll back the full approach to licensing in Maryland. We must insist on access to affordable, reliable, licensed childcare in all of our diverse childcare settings in Maryland.

There has been so much unlicensed childcare in Prince George's County that our County Executive, Angela Alsobrooks, had a campaign "Who's watching your child?" when she was States Attorney, to call attention to parents about licensing being the safe choice for childcare. Parents are duped into thinking programs are licensed because a bus picks up kids at a school. We worked so hard to fight for supporting our licensed programs and as we are suffering greatly during this pandemic with very diminished enrollment, you would be making it legal for families to choose to enroll in cheaper unlicensed programs leaving vacancies in our safe, licensed, high quality programs.

Why is licensed care important? It's important because it means that the program and providers:

- meet the state's requirements for health and safety in the program's operations
- are trained in appropriate supervision and accountability practices
- follow health practices

- have sufficient numbers of adults to supervise based on the number of children in the program
- are regularly monitored
- are adhering to *one* system in Maryland for parents to navigate

Families are doing their best, choosing from among what they can afford with too often too little support.

School-age childcare – whether it is before or after school, in the summer months, or supporting virtual learning - requires and deserves appropriate safety and health practices too. We believe that all programs responsible for the well-being and safety of children should be licensed, adhere to basic safety and health standards, and receive the support of monitoring, assistance and resources from MSDE.

The pandemic crisis and the economic crisis have created enormous challenges for child care programs.

- As of February 7, 2021, according to MSDE data, 181 licensed programs in Prince George's have not yet re-opened.
- As of February 5, 2021, according to MSDE data, 898 licensed centers and family child care homes across the state are not yet open and operating.
- While a majority of licensed settings are open, they face deep challenges of under-enrollment and the pressures of their operating budgets as parent demand is so varied. The economic impact on childcare has been devastating. We must stabilize the childcare sector and the well-being of people who work in childcare.

These challenges are not solved by exempting some childcare settings from licensure.

If any childcare programs are struggling with licensing, they need support, not an exemption.

HB 1307 is not an emergency bill. This is not the emergency. We have an opportunity to address the childcare crisis through federal investment, General Assembly leadership, and MSDE action.

Please oppose HB 1307. Please contact me if you have any questions or would like to talk about ideas for supporting childcare in Maryland.

Sincerely,

Flora Gee, M.Ed.
Director

