



Testimony Concerning HB 513
“Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Support Services Program - Established”
Submitted to the Senate Education, Health, & Environmental
Affairs and Budget & Taxation Committees
March 23, 2022

Position: Support

Maryland Family Network (MFN) strongly supports HB 513, which would formally establish and increase funding for the Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Support Services Program (IECMHSSP). IECMHSSP provides critical and highly effective mental health and social-emotional support services for young children, their child care programs, and their families.

MFN has worked since 1945 to improve the availability and quality of child care and early childhood education as well as other supports for children and families in Maryland. We have been active in state and federal debates on child care policy and are strongly committed to ensuring that children, along with their parents, have access to high-quality, affordable programs and educational opportunities.

IECMHSSP is a prevention-based service. It pairs a mental health consultant and/or a behavioral specialist with early education professionals who work with infants and young children (and their families) in the places where they learn and grow, such as child care programs. IECMHSSP demonstrably improves classroom climate, improves teacher confidence, and decreases challenging behavior in children. It has documented outstanding success in preventing suspensions and expulsions from preschool settings.

Last year, this Committee passed HB 776, which required a thorough evaluation of the program. The resulting report confirms the strengths of the program, but also highlights “a stark need for increased access to the project’s services.” Research indicates that of the 430,000 Maryland children from birth to age 5, between 8,700 and 30,000 need the services IECMHSSP provides. Given current resources, only a tiny fraction—6% of the low-end population estimate—can be served. Even that figure likely understates the degree of unmet need amid the pandemic.

HB 513 would increase the State’s modest investment in IECMHSSP, from just under \$2 million to \$3 million, and help address the glaring need for more mental health consultation services for young children, their child care programs, and their families. MFN respectfully urges the Committee’s favorable consideration of HB 513.

