

Testimony Concerning HB 513: “Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Program – Established”
Submitted to the House Ways & Means Committee, February 17, 2022
by the directors of the MSDE Funded Consultation Programs

Position: Favorable

We are writing to express our appreciation to the subcommittee for today’s hearing on HB 513: “Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Program - Established,” and for their attention to this important program, which works to support the mental health needs of our youngest students in their earliest educational settings throughout the state. **As the Directors of the 12 programs that make up the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), Division of Early Childhood’s funded project, we are writing jointly to express our favorable support of the bill as proposed.**

Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (IECMHC) is a prevention-based service that pairs a mental health consultant with families and adults who work with infants and young children in the different settings where they learn and grow, such as child care, preschool, and their home. The aim is to build adults’ capacity to strengthen and support the healthy social and emotional development of children — early and before intervention is needed. At its core, IECMHC is intended to create fundamental shifts in early childhood professionals’ beliefs, attitudes, and practices to support more effective caregiving for all children, regardless of race, gender, class, or a myriad of other factors.

As you know, Maryland was a leader in adaption of Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation, with the initial pilot program in 2002, and has remained committed to utilizing our effective programs as a key strategy to promote positive social emotional development and address behavioral concerns in young children. Child care providers and parents across the state can access IECMHC services free of charge throughout the state of Maryland. Services include:

- Observation and assessment of children and the child care environment using research-based tools
- Partnering with child care providers to deliver training, mentoring, and coaching to help create environments that better support the social and emotional needs of young children
- Increasing childcare staff skills in addressing the social and emotional needs of children to improve readiness for school
- Supporting child care providers to help retain and serve children with behavioral and mental health needs
- Supporting positive relationships with providers and families

Over the past two years work and lives have been significantly disrupted by the COVID-19 global pandemic that sent children and child care providers behind masks and closed many classrooms. We have seen increased attention to the potential impact and reach of consultation to support the child care workforce. IECMHC is in many ways at ground zero for this pandemic, navigating issues of classroom hygiene and safety, economic impact of the pandemic and extended stress of delivery of services in a limited nature. All of this has both impacted and highlighted the importance of early childhood and family-focused work and settings, as we all worked to engage and support families through zoom calls and computer screens.

We are appreciative of the bill's effort to include funding for the program, as each of our programs deal with issues of wait lists and underserved children, families and child care providers based on flat funding and increased population demands.

Again, thank you for your commitment to our state's youngest students, their families, and the early childhood educators that so dedicatedly serve them.

Sincerely,

*Denise Taylor-Turner, Director
Project Right Steps, Serving: Kent, Queen
Anne's, Caroline, Talbot, and Dorchester
Counties*

*Heather Glass, Director
APPLES (Early Childhood Destination:
Inclusion), Serving: Garrett, Allegany, and
Washington Counties*

*Kelly Hutter, Director
Project First Choice, Serving: Calvert,
Charles, and St. Mary's Counties*

*Morgan Horvath, Director
Project ACT Early Childhood Consultation
Services, Serving: Baltimore County, Cecil,
and Harford Counties*

*Nancy Pelton, Director
Early Intervention Project, Serving:
Baltimore City*

*Patty Morison, Director
Partnership for Emotionally Resilient Kids,
Serving: Carroll and Frederick Counties*

*Sheila Maness, Director
Project WIN, Serving: Prince Georges
County
CHAMPS, Serving: Anne Arundel County*

*Janelle Parker, Director
Lower Shore Early Intervention Program,
Serving: Wicomico, Worcester, and
Somerset Counties*