



**Testimony in support of
House Bill 495: Early Childhood Development – Child Care Scholarship
Program – Funding**

**Ways and Means Committee
Position: Favorable**

February 15, 2023

Strong Schools Maryland is a network of education advocates dedicated to ensuring the full funding and faithful implementation of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future. We advocate for legislative and regulatory policy changes to further educational equity and build the technical capacity of everyday Marylanders to hold state and local officials accountable to their responsibilities. **Strong Schools Maryland urges a favorable vote on House Bill 495: Early Childhood Development – Child Care Scholarship Program – Funding.**

The passage of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future began a new period in Maryland's journey to achieve educational equity, especially with regard to early learning. The Blueprint established publicly-funded, full day pre-kindergarten in the state so that all children are ready to learn and be successful when they enter kindergarten. The Pre-Kindergarten Expansion Grant Program includes private providers, who must ensure that a certain percentage of their four-year-old and three-year-old slots are filled using grant funds. The Blueprint also created more funding for childcare for our state's families by raising the income requirements for the Child Care Scholarship (CCS) Program. These and other early learning policies create more opportunities for families to gain access to affordable, high-quality options for their children.

HB 495:

- Secures funding for the Child Care Scholarship Program, removing uncertainty and affirming our state's commitment to early learning;
- Protects the Program by codifying the circumstances in which it can be frozen; and
- Ensures that the Program copay levels do not increase and income eligibility does not decrease, keeping child care affordable for families.

The early years of childhood are the most pivotal period for brain development in a student's life, which is why the importance of high-quality, affordable, accessible child care cannot be overstated. Through the Child Care Scholarship Program, we have the infrastructure in place to provide this for Maryland families. HB 495 sets this program up for success by enshrining crucial protections for families in law and expanding eligibility.

We implore you to use this Session to pass legislation that aligns with the Blueprint's vision of investing in early childhood to set students up for lifelong learning and achievement.

For these reasons, we urge a favorable report on House Bill 495.

*For more information, contact Maddie Long:
maddie@strongschoolsmaryland.org*