



Serving Learners, Families, and the Community

CECIL COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

DEPARTMENT OF STUDENT SERVICES

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Diana B. Hawley
President, Board of Education

Written Testimony:
House Bill 1381-Education-Publicly Funded Prekindergarten
Appropriations Committee

March 12, 2024

Jeffrey A. Lawson, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools
Cecil County Public Schools

Please be advised that on behalf of Cecil County Public Schools, I am requesting that House Bill 1381 – Education – Publicly Funded Prekindergarten – Payments to Private Providers, sponsored by Delegate Teresa Reilly, be given a favorable recommendation by the Appropriations Committee. This legislation aids in our work shared with the Cecil County Government to ensure equitable access to high-quality prekindergarten education for all children in our community, irrespective of whether they attend public or private institutions.

The portion of HB 1381 that changes the enrollment calculation for Blueprint private providers provides private providers with a smoothed funding outlook. This means that the bill helps to mitigate the impact of fluctuations in enrollment, ensuring that a drop in enrollment does not jeopardize the viability of these vital community prekindergarten providers. Providing forward funding to private providers is crucial for providing stability, predictability, and consistency of the financing. This stability is essential for the success of small businesses in remaining fiscally viable.

Cecil County government has expressed a desire to allow pre-k in county-owned spaces, and we appreciate this effort at problem-solving and thinking outside of traditional models. This provision enables existing providers to enhance their services and encourages entrepreneurial-minded individuals to open new private prekindergarten facilities in previously underutilized spaces. By leveraging county-owned spaces, private providers can maximize their resources and expand local capacity for prekindergarten.

CCPS currently has 658 full-day prekindergarten seats, comprising 638 public and 20 private seats. However, with the full implementation of the Blueprint, we anticipate a need for an additional 1,370 seats, bringing the total to 2,000 seats. Without pragmatic ways to support private providers' participation in the Blueprint Pre-K expansion, we project a necessity for 62 new classrooms, which would place a significant capital budget burden on the district, County, and state. However, every private provider that joins the Blueprint will decrease projected capital costs.

Cecil County and CCPS share the desire to ensure that these private providers receive the necessary support and resources to remain economically viable, community-oriented, and independent. The participation of private providers in the Blueprint will result in savings for both CCPS and the County, as the capital costs associated with serving 3 and 4-year-olds are substantial. Cecil County currently has 66 licensed childcare providers. Of those 66, two are eligible to consider becoming a private provider. These providers are integral to meeting the diverse needs of our community and serve as a source of employment in Cecil County. Our early childhood team would need to contact each private provider to understand their barriers to participating in the Blueprint.

Cecil County Public Schools will **support House Bill 1381** and all bills that expand the ability of private prekindergarten providers to participate in the Blueprint and request a **favorable committee report**.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jeffrey A. Lawson".

Jeffrey A. Lawson, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools