

March 4, 2024

Members of the General Assembly
100 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401

Subject: HB1381 - Education - Publicly Funded Prekindergarten, SUPPORT

Dear Members of the General Assembly,

As the Blueprint Coordinator for Harford County Public Schools, I am writing to support HB 1381, sponsored by our local delegate, Theresa Reilly. This legislation aids in our work shared with the Harford 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 provide private providers with a smoothed funding outlook – meaning 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 pre-K providers. Of great significance, the provision forward funding private providers is crucial for providing stability, predictability, and consistency in funding. This stability is essential for the success of small businesses to remain fiscally viable.

Harford 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 pre-K facilities in previously underutilized spaces. By leveraging county-owned spaces, private providers can maximize their resources and expand local capacity for pre-K.

Currently, HCPS has 716 full-day pre-K seats, comprising 700 public seats and 16 private seats. However, with the full implementation of the Blueprint, we anticipate a need for an additional 2,579 seats, bringing the total to 3,295 seats. Without pragmatic ways to support private providers' participation in the Blueprint Pre-K expansion, we project a necessity for 121 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.

It is a shared desire for both Harford County and HCPS 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 significant savings for both HCPS and the County, as the capital costs associated with serving 3 and 4-year-olds are substantial. Harford County currently has 305 small business private providers, with 99 operating as small business centers and 206 as women-owned in-home businesses. These providers are integral to meeting the diverse educational needs of

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our community and serve as a significant source of employment for women in Harford County. Last year, our early childhood team engaged with each private provider to understand their barriers to participation in the Blueprint, and unfortunately, the current bureaucracy creates numerous hurdles for them. We have collected data showcasing these barriers and have attached them to this letter.

In conclusion, HCPS supports this bill and all bills that support expanding the ability for private pre-K providers to participate in the Blueprint.

Sincerely,

