



Testimony in Support of SB419, Therapeutic Child Care Grant Program
Senate Budget & Taxation Committee
January 31, 2024, 1:00 pm
Respectfully submitted by
Dennis C. Alexander, Director of Government Relations

Mr. Chair and Members of the Committee, on behalf of Easterseals, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support SB419 to restore funding to the Therapeutic Child Care Grant Program.

Easterseals is a nonprofit organization serving Maryland (except for the Eastern Shore), Northern Virginia, and the District of Columbia, leading the way to full equity, inclusion, and access through direct and life-changing disability and community services to thousands of children and adults in our neighborhoods, regardless of their disability, military status, income, race, or age.

We currently operate eight successful child development centers and Head Start programs, five of which are located in Maryland. Our inclusive classrooms create an environment in which children of all abilities learn new skills, develop relationships, share a sense of belonging, prepare for school, and appreciate diversity in others. These programs provide early identification and intervention for disabilities and developmental delays.

The Therapeutic Child Care Grant Program is critical to organizations like Easterseals that specialize in providing early child development services to children under the age of 6 years who have developmental delays, physical disabilities, or delays in social, emotional, or behavioral functioning. Since so few child care providers are willing to accept these children, families with children who need this type of support seek out Easterseals and our centers are overwhelmed with more requests than we can fill. But because this care requires more highly trained staff and lower child-to-teacher ratios, the cost of providing these services limits the number of children we can serve. Support from programs like the Therapeutic Child Care Grant Program is absolutely essential.

Thirty percent of the children enrolled in Easterseals child development programs have special needs that are behavioral health or medical in nature. However, these children are not evenly dispersed across the age groups that attend the programs. Most are from age 2 through Pre-Kindergarten, which means that 60% of children in some classrooms have special needs. This means that increased training and professional development is required to meet the needs of these children and provide an inclusive setting,

To better support these classrooms, Easterseals has invested heavily in training teachers to get the Registered Behavioral Technician certification. We also have staff trained in Applied Behavioral Analysis who can supervise the Registered Behavioral Technicians who develop the behavioral plans

and necessary interventions.

In summary, while other child care programs are unable or unwilling to serve these children with special needs, Easterseals continues to offer high quality, inclusive early child care that supports children with special behavioral and medical needs and helps them succeed by preparing them and their families for transition to kindergarten and beyond.

The Therapeutic Child Care Grant Program serves a critical role in helping us serve some of our most fragile children and I encourage you to support funding for this program.