



**MARYLAND
CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE**

January 31, 2024

SB 419

Therapeutic Child Care Grant Program - Funding - Alterations

Senate Budget and Taxation Committee

Position: FAVORABLE

The Maryland Catholic Conference offers this testimony of favorable with amendments for Senate Bill 419. The Catholic Conference is the public policy representative of the three (arch)dioceses serving Maryland, which together encompass over one million Marylanders. Statewide, their parishes, schools, hospitals and numerous charities combine to form our state's second largest social service provider network, behind only our state government. We offer this testimony on behalf of the families of more than 50,000 students served by over 150 PreK-12 Catholic schools in Maryland.

Senate Bill 419 would extend funding for the Therapeutic Child Care Grant Program. The purpose of the Program is to provide grants to providers that specialize in providing child care and early childhood education to children under the age of 6 years who have developmental delays, physical disabilities, or delays in social, emotional, or behavioral functioning. The Conference previously supported legislation to create the Program in 2022. Therein, funding was only mandated for fiscal years 2023, 2024 and 2025. This legislation would ensure the existence of and funding for the program after fiscal year 2025.

Children are the core of the family unit and any legislation that seeks to stabilize their child care environment should be considered a priority. Stable child care is an essential component to supporting strong, economically secure families. Moreover, enabling working parents' continued access to child care services is an imperative part of combating poverty. Often, a barrier to sustainable and full-time employment is the availability and affordability of reliable child care services. The State should thus do all it can to support access to child care services for working parents.

This bill would provide specialized child care to those children who most need attention in addressing their cognitive, emotional, psychosocial and language development. Moreover, funding continuity is an important aspect in educating children with disabilities. It is for these reasons we request a favorable report on Senate Bill 419.