



March 27, 2024

## Testimony Concerning House Bill 1441 – Early Childhood Education - Publicly Funded Prekindergarten Programs - Alterations

The Montgomery County [Children's Opportunity Alliance](#) is a newly locally legislated Early Care and Education Coordinating Entity that brings community together to create a more equitable, accessible, high-quality, and sustainable early childhood system that narrows disparities and puts young children on a path to reach their greatest potential.

We urge you to support HB1441 – Early Childhood Education – Publicly Funded Prekindergarten Programs – Alterations. The *Blueprint for Maryland's Future* is a laudable and transformative legislation that shows true investment in our youngest citizens through Pillar 1. We believe that a mixed-delivery Pre-K system, that involves both public schools and private community-based child care providers, is needed to make high quality early childhood education available to the 3 and 4 year olds who need it the most.

The amendments added in the House have made this current draft an incredibly strong and valuable piece of legislation that has the potential to set implementation of the Pre-K mixed delivery system on a more successful course. It takes steps to overcome barriers without sacrificing quality. It accomplishes this by:

- Providing alternative pathways to certification for private pre-kindergarten providers;
- Creating support systems to help community-based prekindergarten providers successfully establish public pre-kindergarten programs while ensuring diversity, community outreach, and business support; and
- Investing in current programs that support the diverse and multicultural child care and prekindergarten workforce in our state.

Montgomery County has the most Pre-K seats in community-based settings across the state. This year we have 208 seats in 6 child care centers and 7 family child care homes (through the Family Child Care Alliance of MD). In order to reach the goals of serving all Tier 1 three- and four-year-olds and all Tier 2 four-year-olds while meeting the 50/50 ratio goal, we estimate that there will need to be over 6,600 seats. We have a long way to go to be able to meet this goal.

However, the model as it exists today for private community-based providers to apply to the Maryland State Department of Education to receive Pre-K grants does not currently work for the majority of private providers in our community. The Children's Opportunity Alliance interviewed child care center directors across the county to hear their perceptions about this opportunity.



Through our interview, we heard that the largest barriers for providers to be eligible and participate include:

- the requirements for teacher education are unrealistic and do not reflect the current workforce
- the administrative burden of applying for and managing a state grant
- the reimbursement rate does not cover the true cost of providing quality care

We need to make alterations to these requirements if we truly want private community-based providers to be eligible for the Pre-K grants. And we need the private community-based providers to get these grants if we truly want to have enough Pre-K seats to meet the needs of working families in our community.

Inequitable access to early care and education impacts the entire community – parents, employers, providers. Improving access to high-quality early education makes a significant impact on the lives of young children, both short and long term, with improved outcomes in education, physical and mental health, employment, and public safety. By addressing the opportunity gap that currently exists for young children from low-income families, we can create a more equitable early childhood system that will have lasting intergenerational benefits.

Submitted on behalf of the Children's Opportunity Alliance.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Laura Jahromi". The signature is fluid and cursive.

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