



MARYLAND  
CATHOLIC  
CONFERENCE

February 26, 2024

**HB 1426**  
**Education – Blueprint for Maryland’s Future – Alterations**

**House Ways & Means Committee**  
**House Appropriations Committee**

**Position: FAVORABLE w/ Amendment**

The Maryland Catholic Conference offers this supporting testimony with amendments to House Bill 1426. 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.

House Bill 1426 would, among other things, add flexibility for prekindergarten providers to employ not only state-certified teachers for prekindergarten expansion, but also those with a bachelors degree *who plan to pursue* a state certification for teaching in early childhood education. While this flexibility is an important change, we propose one additional element of flexibility based on alternative pathways for prekindergarten teachers approved by the Maryland State Department of Education.

Nonpublic school prekindergarten providers have received mixed- delivery prekindergarten expansion grant sites in the first round of expansion in 2022, winning competitive grant bids for programs to provide prekindergarten to four-year-old children whose family income is 300% of the federal poverty level (FPL) or lower. Nonpublic providers have the capacity to offer high quality seats at our programs and are enthused to continue to partner with the state of Maryland in advancing the educational vision of the Kirwan Commission through mixed-delivery prekindergarten expansions.

These sites include Catholic schools who are partnering with the State of Maryland to provide high-quality prekindergarten to low-income students. Catholic providers have long participated in and supported prekindergarten expansion in Maryland. All three of (arch)dioceses serving Maryland have a strong commitment to education. Within the State of Maryland, there are approximately 120 prekindergarten programs in Catholic schools or parishes, in addition to Headstart programs. Nearly all are accredited by an accrediting agency recognized by MSDE and a vast majority of them employ state-certified prekindergarten

teachers. However, some added flexibility for expansion sites would certainly accelerate Maryland's ambitions prekindergarten expansion goals.

A strong prekindergarten education has been proven to greatly enhance a child's educational trajectory. Like early childhood care, it is also an essential component to supporting strong, economically secure families. Prekindergarten availability also helps to empower working parents with workplace access, an imperative part of combating poverty. For these reasons, the Conference respectfully requests a favorable report on House Bill 1426, inclusive of the amendment below.

### **Amendment to House Bill 1426**

#### **Amendment No. 1**

On Page 7, line 20, after "DEGREE", add: "OR AN EQUIVALENT FOR PREKINDERGARTEN TEACHERS BASED ON ALTERNATIVE PATHWAYS APPROVED BY MARYLAND STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION"