



**MARYLAND
CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE**

February 26, 2024

HB 1441

Education – Blueprint for Maryland’s Future – Alterations

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

Position: INFORMATION w/ Amendment

The Maryland Catholic Conference offers this informational testimony with amendments to House Bill 1441. 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 1441 would, among other things, remove the requirement passed as a major component of the Blueprint legislation, which was supported by the Conference, that 50% of prekindergarten expansion slots be provided through private prekindergarten providers. This legislation instead states a “goal” of 50%, which would gravely impact both the number of prekindergarten and associated child care providers in this state, as well as impact the ability to provide universal prekindergarten in our state as mandated by the Blueprint.

Substantial work was put into the universal prekindergarten expansion provisions currently in law by the Kirwan Commission, lawmakers, advocates and the provider community to get the Blueprint prekindergarten expansion right. Experiences from other states were drawn upon and the impact on local and community-based providers was assessed. The law as it stands reflects that. To undo the sensitive and important parameters around the provision of mixed-delivery prekindergarten would not only have serious detrimental effects on the prekindergarten expansion effort, but could also have a serious economic “ripple effect” on prekindergarten and child care providers in Maryland.

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.

We respectfully urge the following amendments to House Bill 1441:

Amendments to House Bill 1441

Amendment No. 1

On Page 4, line 16, strike bold face bracket - “[”

Amendment No. 2

On Page 5, line 12, strike bold face bracket - “]”

Amendment No. 3

On Page 5, strike lines 13-16