



THE FAMILY CHILD CARE  
**Alliance**  
OF MARYLAND

## Testimony Concerning: HB 1441

### Title: Early Childhood Education – Publicly Funded Prekindergarten Programs – 2 Alterations

Submitted to Ways and Means and Appropriations

Date of hearing: February 26, 2024

## Position: Support with Amendment

The Family Child Care Alliance of Maryland (the Alliance) was incorporated in 2019 to develop a staffed family child care (FCC) network to provide various types of technical assistance to the over four thousand FCC providers in Maryland. In 2020, in cooperation with the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), the Alliance created the ASPIRE PreK program to grow the supply of state-funded PreK programs in eligible FCC homes. Prior to the creation of the ASPIRE program, MSDE reports that an average of one FCC provider participated in the state-funded PreK program each year.

In the fall of 2023, the ASPIRE PreK program had established fifty PreK programs in eligible FCC homes, at least one program in sixteen of the state's school districts. All fifty programs are led by a lead teacher with either a P-3 certification or they have a bachelor's degree and are pursuing certification. As of February 2024, over 220 eligible three and four-year-olds are enrolled in these programs, along with over four hundred more of various ages. Our goal is to have five hundred programs across the state by FY 2031 with space for over three thousand PreK-aged children.

All PreK teachers in ASPIRE PreK go through an intensive three-year program supported by highly qualified instructional coaches. Our program focuses on improving teaching practice, programmatic effectiveness, and creating environments consistent with high-quality PreK programs. This program is designed to mirror the three-year induction program required for new teachers in Maryland's school districts.

The goals of the ASPIRE program are:

- To increase the supply of P-3 certified teachers providing high-quality PreK instruction in FCC homes;
- To build a support network for P-3 certified teachers working in FCC homes;
- To ensure all children in FCC PreK programs, regardless of eligibility for public PreK, enter kindergarten with all the skills they need to succeed and
- To lead the effort to design and test systems to best support PreK in FCC and then make those findings available across the field.

The Alliance strongly supports *most* of the proposed changes to HB 1441. However, we *cannot* support the proposed change to 7-1A-03. The ratios of a 50/50 split of PreK seats between school districts and private providers in the original law help to ensure the health of the local child care market. The proposed change makes the 50/50 split a "GOAL" and creates the potential for district-driven decisions that could devastate the local child care marketplace. The impact of such decisions could defeat the intent of the Blueprint to create a robust mixed-delivery system for PreK, depriving parents of choice and potentially collapsing the supply of care for infants and toddlers. We ask you to reject this specific change to the legislation. There are several components of the proposed legislation that will help accelerate the supply of seats available for eligible three and four-year-olds to meet the goals of the Blueprint for Maryland's future.

The Alliance strongly supports the rest of HB 1441, in particular, section 7-1A-04.1, which lowers the bar for lead teacher qualifications from July 1, 2025, through June 30, 2027. Over the last nearly four years, the ASPIRE PreK program has demonstrated that educators with an associate's degree and/or a Child Development Associate Certificate and extensive experience CAN be trained to deliver high-quality PreK within an intensive program such as the ASPIRE PreK framework. This change alone would open the door to potentially hundreds of new educators coming into the PreK system. We hope you will reject the change to 7-1A-03 as noted above and support the rest of HB 1441.