



House Bill 1441

Early Childhood Education - Publicly Funded Prekindergarten Programs - Alterations

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Ways and Means and Appropriations
Committee

Date: February 26, 2024

From: Brianna January

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** HB 1441. HB 1441 tackles several impediments to pre-K expansion, including workforce shortages, lack of physical space for early childhood facilities, and subpar private provider engagement. **Importantly, this bill incorporates many of the suggestions from county governments to help effectively implement this critical aspect of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future.**

On workforce development, HB 1441 creates pathways for more flexibility in provider qualifications and authorizes prospective staff to work in the field while pursuing the appropriate certifications. It also extends the Maryland Child Care Credential Program an extra two years through FY26 to recognize individual child care providers who increase their qualifications beyond the requirements of state licensing and registration regulations.

On facilities and capacity, HB 1441 authorizes local education agencies (LEAs) to lease space from the county government to use as pre-K facilities. Several counties own and maintain facilities that could be used for early childhood education. Allowing LEAs to lease these spaces increases facility capacity accessibly and affordably and makes use of otherwise vacant or unused spaces.

On private providers, HB 1441 makes several critical adjustments to the Blueprint's mixed-delivery system. The bill replaces the requirement that 50 percent of pre-K be serviced by private providers and instead makes it the "goal of the State." This is a reasonable adjustment as many LEAs are finding subpar interest in public pre-K from the private provider community. Additionally, HB 1441 creates a technical assistance program at the Maryland State Department of Education to help connect private providers with various local resources for business development, like local chambers of commerce and workforce development boards. HB 1441 also extends provider grants and the Maryland EXCELS program an extra two years each to support the expansion and start-up of providers.

Counties applaud these reasonable and needed adjustments to ensure successful expansion of early childhood education and to best serve all Maryland's three- and four-year-olds. For these reasons, MACo **SUPPORTS HB 1441** and urges a **FAVORABLE** report.