

February 26, 2024

The Honorable Vanessa Atterbeary
Chair, House Ways and Means Committee
6 Bladen Street, Room 131
House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: HB1441 - *Early Childhood Education - Publicly Funded Prekindergarten Programs - Alterations*

Dear Chairwoman Atterbeary:

KinderCare Learning Companies, operating 35 centers and 16 before/ after school sites serving over 4,700 children across Maryland, strongly support HB1441, altering numerous barriers present in the state preschool expansion efforts through addressing teacher qualifications, private provider participation, and developing a memorandum for county boards to utilize in preschool expansion efforts. The legislation introduced by Chairwoman Atterbeary will expedite the goals of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future.

KinderCare applauds the state's efforts to expand access and affordability to early childhood education (ECE) programs through increased investments in preschool and the child care scholarship program. Addressing current barriers that are presented in HB1441 will further support these efforts.

HB1441 will create two classes of teacher's certificates in ECE - a first-class certificate that requires a bachelor's degree in any field and a second-class certificate that requires an associate degree in early childhood education or child development. Reports reveal at least 100,000 fewer ECE professionals across the United States than before the pandemic.¹ Expanding the eligibility of potential candidates can further help providers address this workforce challenge and, more importantly, align credentialing standards with qualified individuals who have studied child development and are trained to support our youngest learners.

Further, this legislation would continue to promote a mixed-delivery preschool partnership involving both public and community-based providers by setting a goal for at least 50% of the preschool slots in each county to be provided by private providers by the 2027-2028 school year. Partnering with community-based providers will allow Maryland to reach their goals of universal preschool access more quickly and effectively by leveraging the existing programs that parents know and trust.

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/13/us/child-care-worker-shortage.html?smid=tw-share>

Lastly, HB1441 would require the Maryland State Department of Education to develop a memorandum of best practices for county boards to utilize in communication and outreach to public and private providers, parents, and other government agencies to ensure the county receives support in achieving this goal.

Failing to make these critical policy changes will delay preschool expansion efforts. HB1441 would further support and identify avenues to achieve the state's goals and commitment to helping working families, increasing accessibility for our youngest learners, and supporting the ECE workforce.

For these reasons, KinderCare strongly supports HB1441, and we respectfully request your vote to support this legislation.

Sincerely,



Rylie Shewbridge
Government Relations Representative
KinderCare Learning Companies