



**Caring For Maryland's Most
Important Natural Resource™**

Maryland State Child Care Association

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The Maryland State Child Care Association (MSCCA) is a non-profit, statewide, professional association incorporated in 1984 to promote the growth and development of child care and learning centers in Maryland. MSCCA has over 5400 members working in the field of child care/early childhood education. We believe children are our most important natural resource and work hard to advocate for children, families and for professionalism within the early childhood community.

Testimony: HB 1455 Public Prekindergarten and Child Care Providers – Waiver Action Plan and Assistance Hubs Submitted to: Ways and Means Committee March 6, 2024

Maryland State Child Care Association enthusiastically supports HB 1455. MSCCA offers thanks to Delegate Solomon for his unwavering support for children, families, and the child care community.

The Waiver Action Plan and Assistance Hubs legislation is important to successful implementation of the Blueprint Pillar 1. HB 1455 recognizes the critical importance of a true, equitable mixed delivery system while also supports numerous recommendations from the recent, December 1, 2023, Accountability and Implementation Board Joint Chairman's Report on *Alternative Quality Requirements and Structural Elements for Private Prekindergarten Providers to Participate in Publicly Funded Kindergarten Programs*.

Child care directly and indirectly impacts everyone. The Blueprint for Maryland's Future expansion of prekindergarten through a mixed delivery system, involving both public schools and private community-based childcare providers, has been challenging, especially for the child care businesses still struggling to recover from the pandemic. Child care is essential to the economy, therefore we cannot afford to lose more child care businesses in Maryland. The expansion of public PreK is concerning as all child care businesses cannot sustain or start businesses without three and four year olds. The inequities/barriers of the Blueprint Pillar 1 must be addressed to support both the private and public sector. It is critical that the state recognize the support and structure necessary to equitably achieve the goal of expanding PreK.

Almost all 24 counties/Baltimore City requested waivers for Pillar 1 as they did not meet the essential component to partner for public PreK slots with private, community-based providers at the required percentage. Maryland cannot let this process for waivers become commonplace if we want to provide PreK in a true mixed delivery system.

HB 1455 seeks to strengthen the waiver language in the Blueprint to legislatively mandate the development of action plan demonstrating how counties intend to meet the requirements in the year immediately following the expiration of the waiver and creates assistance hubs to support both public and private programs to avoid using waivers in the future.

Child care is the workforce behind the workforce and drives the economy. There are approximately 6,700 child care programs in Maryland. According to MSDE 857 child care programs are participating in Maryland Accreditation (numerous others are national accredited). Additionally, 80% of the 2,700 licensed child care centers and 56% of family child care providers are participating in Maryland EXCELS. We have the slots in child care programs to achieve public PreK and we must find ways to continue to serve our families and stay in business without competing against public schools. HB 1455 will aid in expanding participation for the community based businesses, including child care centers and family child care in Maryland through hubs recommended by the AIB.

This bill supports shared services and partnerships including, grant writing support, shared business functions, better information sharing and communication strategies, resources, templates for MOU's, business services, coordination of health department services, all the while reducing barriers and strengthening partnerships in concrete ways. Basically,

building bridges through organized, comprehensively led HUB's that do not exist and will be difficult to do without legislation.

The important representation on the Hub model of Hb 1455 will engage experts and partners necessary for successful collaboration to support the list of recommendations in the Accountability and Implementation Board (AIB) for improving implementation of the Blueprint Pillar 1. HB 1455 encompasses all of the recommendation topics spelled out in the December 1, 2023, AIB report with representation and targeted goals to address the barriers and move towards the minimum 50/50% split of voluntary public prekindergarten for all four-year-olds and eligible three year olds. Hubs cannot be driven solely by MSDE or LEA's or private providers, we must have stakeholders at the table to provide critical feedback for success.

MSCCA recommends the following amendments for additions to the expert stakeholder representation list:

MSCCA recommends amendments to include:

One Representative for children with disabilities from the Developmental Disabilities Council of Maryland.

One Representative from the state Office of Child Care Advisory Council that is not employees at MSDE.

and

Change Maryland State Child care Association to Executive Director or designee.

There are multiple bills working in tandem to strengthen alternative and provisional pathways to decrease the barriers to participation in mixed delivery of PreK, as well as decrease the need to obtain waivers to meet the requirements of Pillar 1. The passage of the Educator Shortage Act last year allows for institutes of higher education, Local Education Agencies, Nonprofits and MSDE to create alternative pathways due to critical teacher shortages. HB 1455 takes additional steps along, with tandem legislation offered this session to strengthen waiver process and create assistance hubs that address numerous barriers to mixed delivery of public PreK that align with the AIB recommendations for Pillar 1.

Finally, the implementation of the Blueprint sliding scale will expand eligibility and impact more families therefore more Pre-K slots are needed. Without centralized and regional Hubs to support Pillar 1 and more legislation that address barriers, the Blueprint related to Pre-K expansion will not be executed with fidelity for a true, equitable mixed delivery system. More child care programs will be at risk for closure and families will suffer from unintended consequences including less access and affordability for infant and toddler care. The time to act is now.

MSCCA urges a favorable report with amendments.

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