

February 26, 2024

The Honorable Vanessa E. Atterbeary, Chair
Ways and Means Committee
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: TESTIMONY ON HB1426 - EDUCATION – BLUEPRINT FOR MARYLAND’S FUTURE – ALTERATIONS - POSITION: FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS

Dear Chair Atterbeary and Members of the Ways and Means Committee:

The Maryland Department of Human Services (DHS) supports House Bill 1426 (HB 1102) with proposed amendments to streamline reporting and data sharing. With offices in every Maryland jurisdiction, DHS empowers individuals and families to reach their full potential, including access to quality early childhood education.

House Bill 1426 holds promise for strengthening our state's pre-kindergarten program, directly impacting thousands of Maryland children and their families. By enhancing collaboration and fostering data utilization, the bill will:

- Increase awareness and enrollment: Proactive outreach to parents about pre-K eligibility and funding options will ensure more children benefit from this critical program. DHS, with established communication channels and community partnerships, can play a key role in increasing awareness and enrollment in pre-K.
- Enhance transparency and accountability: DHS already collects and reports valuable data on early childhood programs. Leveraging existing reporting structures and data-sharing agreements will provide comprehensive information on program effectiveness and reach while minimizing redundancies.
- Promote seamless coordination: Data sharing with local school systems will facilitate smoother transitions and better align early childhood education efforts.

We recommend amending the bill to remove duplicate reporting requirements for Local Departments of Social Services (LDSSs) and using existing DHS reporting structures and established data-sharing with the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE). Through our existing Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), DHS already efficiently shares data with MSDE on certifying children for free or reduced school lunches. This MOU can be expanded to satisfy the data sharing requirements of House Bill 1426. The proposed amendment eliminates redundancies, promotes collaboration, and optimizes resources to ensure timely and accurate data sharing.



Specifically, we recommend following:

On page 8; lines 15-19

~~"(3) ON OR BEFORE DECEMBER 1 OF EACH YEAR, EACH LOCAL DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES~~ **THE DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES** AND EACH LOCAL HEALTH DEPARTMENT SHALL REPORT TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY, IN ACCORDANCE WITH § 2-1257 OF THE STATE GOVERNMENT ARTICLE, ON THE NUMBER OF PARENTS WHO WERE GIVEN A NOTIFICATION AND SUBSEQUENTLY ENROLLED THEIR CHILD IN A PUBLICLY FUNDED PREKINDERGARTEN PROGRAM."

On page 9; lines 20-23

~~"(B) EACH LOCAL DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES~~ **THE DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES** OR A LOCAL HEALTH DEPARTMENT SHALL PROVIDE TO EACH LOCAL SCHOOL SYSTEM THE NAME AND CONTACT INFORMATION FOR EACH PARENT OR GUARDIAN PROVIDED NOTICE UNDER SUBSECTION (A) OF THIS SECTION."

These improvements align perfectly with DHS' commitment to serving Maryland's children and families. Early childhood education is proven to enhance cognitive development, school readiness, and future socioeconomic success. Expanding access and ensuring program effectiveness are crucial to empowering the next generation.

We appreciate the opportunity to offer our strong support for HB1426 with amendments that promote efficiency and collaboration. This legislation represents a significant step forward in ensuring every Maryland child has the opportunity to thrive through access to quality pre-kindergarten education. We look forward to the Committee's decision and continued collaboration on this important issue.

If you require additional information, please contact Rachel Sledge, Director of Government Affairs, at rachel.sledge@maryland.gov.

In service,



Rafael López
Secretary