

Hearing Testimony March 6, 2024
House Ways and Means Committee
Service Employees International Union, Local 500

HB1455
Public Prekindergarten and Child Care Providers - Waiver Action Plan and Assistance Hubs
SUPPORT

SEIU Local 500 represents over 20,000 workers throughout the DMV including the childcare workers in the State of Maryland. Our members are vital to the wellbeing of children in this state. We enthusiastically support HB1455 and thank Delegate Solomon for his championing of early childhood issues over the years.

The Blueprint for Maryland's Future prioritizes investment in the state's youngest residents. To accommodate the growing number of eligible students for public pre-kindergarten, a Mixed-Delivery Pre-K system, involving both public schools and private community-based childcare providers, is essential. However, to achieve the outlined goals of this blueprint, it's crucial for the state to address the various obstacles hindering private child care providers from meeting the current codified requirements for a 50-50 split of private and public pre-kindergarten slots by the 2026-2027 school year.

Recognizing that reaching the 50% goal requires time and effort, the Blueprint includes a provision allowing County Boards to request waivers from MSDE if they struggle to meet the goal in a given year. HB1455 proposes sensible adjustments to this waiver process, requiring County Boards to submit action plans demonstrating how they plan to fulfill the requirements in the following year.

Furthermore, HB1455 acknowledges that private providers may require assistance navigating the process to participate in public pre-kindergarten. The bill proposes the establishment of assistance hubs statewide to support childcare providers and facilitate partnerships within the mixed-delivery system. Additionally, it establishes a Child Care Provider Hub Advisory Committee comprising diverse stakeholders and experts to advise MSDE on implementing the hub program across Maryland. This hub model aligns with a recommendation by the AIB in a report on the mixed-delivery system.

It's evident that investing in universal pre-k is vital for Maryland's children, and HB1455 takes essential steps to ensure that private providers receive the necessary support to participate effectively in the mixed-delivery system.

We therefore request a favorable report on HB1455.