

TO: House Ways and Means Committee

BILL: House Bill (HB) 1441 - Early Childhood Education - Publicly Funded Prekindergarten Programs - Alterations

DATE: February 22, 2024

POSITION: Support with Amendments

The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) and the Maryland State Board of Education (State Board) extend their support for **House Bill (HB) 1441 Early Childhood Education - Publicly Funded Prekindergarten Programs - Alterations**, with amendments. MSDE and the State Board are dedicated to supporting the scaling of high-quality Prekindergarten across the State in alignment with the Blueprint for Maryland's Future.

HB 1441 extends critical funding for the Child Care Incentive Grant Program and the Maryland Child Care Credential Program and provides additional financial support avenues for early childhood programs and their educators. Both programs enable MSDE to better support early childhood educators in Maryland. In addition, HB 1441 serves as a positive step in extending the timeline for counties to enhance and expand private providers for public Prekindergarten services. It not only promotes collaboration between MSDE and counties in sharing information but also emphasizes the importance of knowledge exchange between private providers and public schools.

HB 1441 also offers valuable support to counties in effectively implementing and expanding the number of private providers catering to public Prekindergarten children. The bill facilitates this process by mandating collaboration between MSDE and counties to compile and share a comprehensive list of eligible Prekindergarten providers within each county, extending this information to local agencies as well. Furthermore, HB 1441 emphasizes the importance of fostering peer-to-peer learning opportunities between private providers and public schools within the county.

However, MSDE requests further consideration around modifying the certification process for early childhood education. Introducing distinctions like "first-class" and "second-class" certifications for lead Prekindergarten teachers intensifies the existing divide within the early education field. Currently, all teachers in public schools must hold a bachelor's degree, while those in private provider settings would be able to attain the role with only an associate degree. This discrepancy raises concerns about transparency for families, as they may not be aware of differing credentials between teachers in private and public settings.

To ensure equity as the State expands Prekindergarten, it is crucial for all lead Prekindergarten teachers to possess the same qualifications, allowing uniform compensation across private provider and public-school settings. The use of terms like "first class" and "second class" in early childhood certification further perpetuates the field's division, contradicting Maryland's goal of unifying credentials and compensation.

It is worth noting that national organizations, such as the [National Institute for Early Education](#) and the [Center for the Study of Child Care Employment](#), emphasize the importance of a bachelor's degree for lead Prekindergarten teachers. Maryland currently meets 7 out of 10 quality requirements, including the bachelor's degree requirement. Removing this criterion would negatively impact the state's ranking in national reviews focused on early childhood education quality.

Beyond the potential divide between private and public providers, there is also a risk of creating a distinction between K-12 and Prekindergarten teachers within public schools, as Prekindergarten teachers might be allowed to hold only an associate degree. Such differentiation in educational qualifications within the same institution could adversely affect the perception of Prekindergarten education.

Instead of lowering qualifications, a more effective approach is for the State to invest significantly in expanding access to stackable credentials, ranging from the Child Development Associate Credential (CDA) to an associate degree and a bachelor's degree with certification. MSDE is already working on aligning the Maryland Child Care Credential program with stackable credentials, supporting educators in achieving the qualifications outlined in the Blueprint for Maryland's Future.

Additionally, MSDE recommends investing in the existing CDA programs. Currently, MSDE covers the full cost of the CDA through a partnership with the Council for Professional Recognition, allowing assistant teachers to obtain the credential in less than a year at no cost. Due to high demand, MSDE has faced limitations in accepting more candidates for the program. Increased investment in this initiative would enable more teachers across the State to obtain their CDA.

MSDE and the State Board look forward to working with the Maryland General Assembly to successfully scale high-quality Prekindergarten in the State by investing in a highly skilled early childhood workforce.

We respectfully request that the committee consider this information as you deliberate on **HB 1441**. Please contact Dr. Akilah Alleyne, Executive Director of Government Affairs, Education Policy, and Government Relations, at Akilah.alleyne@maryland.gov or at 410-767-0504 or Zach Hands, Executive Director of the State Board, at Zachary.hands1@maryland.gov or at 443-915-6094, if you would like any additional information.