



DATE: February 28, 2024 **COMMITTEE:** House Ways and Means Committee
BILL NO: House Bill 1261
BILL TITLE: Commission on Access to High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Childcare for Children Three Years Old and Younger
POSITION: Support w/amendment

Kennedy Krieger Institute supports with amendment: House Bill 1261 - Commission on Access to High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Childcare for Children Three Years Old and Younger.

Bill Summary:

House Bill 1261 would establish the Commission on Access to High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Childcare for Children Three Years and Younger.

Background:

Kennedy Krieger Institute is home to four early childhood education programs including:

- Parents and Children Together (PACT); Helping Children with Disabilities Therapeutic Nursery (Southeast Early Head Start)
- Parents and Children Together (PACT); World of Care
- Center for Autism and Related Disorders (CARD); Inclusive Pre-K (Center for Autism Services, Science and Innovation (CASSI) at Kennedy Krieger Institute)

These programs are built on an inclusion model – bringing together typically developing children with those who are neurodiverse or have medical needs to learn together in a safe and supportive environment.

Rationale:

Children with low socioeconomic status (SES) face significant barriers to school readiness. ¹ Low SES children are at higher risk for poor physical and psychological health, lower education achievement, and poverty. ²

Under-resourced young children, including those with developmental disabilities and other special needs, and their families, encounter a variety of obstacles in traditional early childhood education settings. Physical barriers such as inaccessible playgrounds or transportation; insufficient professional development for care providers; a lack of financial resources to support specialized care; social stigma among providers, parents, and children; and limited access to developmentally appropriate and/or therapeutic services that work in close coordination with early childhood education providers; are some of the many challenges that children and families face.

Lack of access to inclusive early learning is one of the most cited reasons for family stress, and disruptions in provision of care reduce the efficacy of critical early intervention afforded during these formative years.

Establishing a Commission to study access to high-quality early childhood education will ensure that all Maryland children will be able to receive evidence-based instructional and caregiver-supported interaction strategies known to accelerate learning and improve developmental outcomes. The more skills that children develop, the more they are equipped to learn. The more they learn, the more prepared they are to benefit from social and educational opportunities at school.

¹ Lauren Micalizzi et al., "Effects of Socioeconomic Status and Executive Function on School Readiness across Levels of Household Chaos," *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 47 (April 1, 2019): 331–40, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2019.01.007>.

² "Education and Socioeconomic Status Factsheet," <https://www.apa.org>, accessed March 9, 2022, <https://www.apa.org/pi/ses/resources/publications/education>.

Amendment:

Kennedy Krieger recommends adding a commission member who would represent the foster youth of Maryland. This could be an **adult who was previously in the Maryland system as a foster youth, a parent of a foster youth, or a leader of a foster youth program or foster youth association.** Since 1986, Kennedy Krieger has been offering a continuum of services for children with special needs who require temporary or permanent out-of-home placement through our Therapeutic Foster Care program. According to the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System, 29% of children entering the foster care system are ages 1 to 5. These children need access to high quality early education that will also link them to early intervention services.

Kennedy Krieger Institute requests a favorable report with amendment on House Bill 1261.

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