

Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

SB462: State Board of Education-Membership-Early Childhood Development Professional

Testimony “In Favor”

My name is Cindi Webb and I am a proud advocate for early childhood education and small business. I currently own Frederick Country Day Montessori School and The Learning Bee, a preschool and childcare center. My businesses have been serving Frederick County since 2007. In addition, I have real estate vacation rentals and I am a John Maxwell coach. I am a mother of 5, grandmother to 2 and my husband and I were foster parents to 23 children in Frederick County, two of whom we were blessed to adopt. Educating, guiding and caring for children is my passion and mission.

I think we can all agree that Early childhood, from birth to age five, is recognized as a critical period for cognitive, social, and emotional development. Investing in quality early education during these formative years lays a strong foundation for future success. Research shows that **90% of a child's brain develops by age five**, forming the neural connections essential for future learning.

Beyond my mission, I am a dedicated business owner and a vital contributor to our economy. I have worked tirelessly to build a high-quality program that currently serves approximately 225 families and has impacted thousands over the years. Unfortunately, decisions—whether intentional or not—have had negative consequences on my business and others in the early education field.

It is essential that early childhood education centers have a voice on the State Board of Education. This is not just logical; it is practical. When decisions are made without considering the needs of small businesses, we are left scrambling to protect our livelihoods and advocate for necessary changes—many of which could have been avoided with our input from the start. MSCCA has been instrumental in being our voice for change.

For example, the Blueprint Mixed Delivery System is critical for the survival of small childcare providers. Without it, most of us would be forced to close. Without three- and four-year-olds in our programs, we simply wouldn't have the resources to sustain our businesses. The economic impact of losing childcare centers would be devastating—leaving families without options for infant, toddler, and two-year-old care.

We also fought for changes to the lead teacher requirements for Pre-K expansion and Blueprint grant programs. Initially, childcare providers were excluded because our teachers do not hold MSDE state teaching certifications. We had to actively lobby for this

requirement to be reconsidered. If we had been included in the conversation from the beginning, unnecessary obstacles could have been avoided, saving time, money, and resources—ultimately benefiting children and families in our communities.

In addition, changes need to be made to the EXCELS rating system as the punitive measures being taken due to licensing non-compliances that are causing severe losses for childcare businesses. These losses include dropping EXCELS level from 5 to 1 which causes a snowball of devastating impacts including not being able to reapply for a grant in Blueprint and therefore losing seats for PreK students. Often this is a loss of a high-quality program for our students in the community which have been rated as high-quality by the grant monitors. It is also a large loss of grant money for the childcare center which causes a loss of employment for teachers and assistants teaching in the grant program. This punitive approach is one which influences other childcare centers in Maryland to delay as long as possible or not participate in the Blueprint. This information needs to be understood by the Board along with many other issues and challenges and early childhood businesses need representation.

The current members on the State Board of Education do not have early childhood expertise nor do they have early childhood business operations expertise. They do not know “what they do not know” and therefore we are seeing decisions made that do not support the unique needs of the early childhood education community. Decisions made in this vacuum are inefficient and short-sighted. Please support us by giving us a voice, ensuring that small businesses are heard, and early childhood education is represented which will lead to thriving early childhood communities. It is both a logical and practical decision.

Cindi Webb

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