



Testimony - SB 359, Child Care Facilities – Criminal History Records Check –
Requirement

Favorable

Senate Education, Energy and the Environment Committee

February 18, 2026

Elly Cowan on Behalf of SEIU Local 500

Honorable Chair Feldman & Members of the Senate Education, Energy and the Environment Committee:

SEIU Local 500 respectfully submits this testimony in support of Senate Bill 359. This legislation takes important steps to streamline and improve the criminal background check process for child care providers and employees in Maryland.

SEIU Local 500 represents early childhood educators and child care professionals. Our members are deeply committed to maintaining safe, high-quality environments for Maryland’s children. Strong background check standards are a critical component of child safety. At the same time, the current system can be slow, duplicative, and burdensome—creating delays that worsen staffing shortages and disrupt child care operations.

SB359 represents a balanced approach that preserves rigorous safety protections while improving efficiency in the background check process.

Across Maryland, child care providers report that delays in criminal background clearances can postpone hiring for weeks or even months. These delays can prevent qualified candidates from starting employment in a timely manner, increase staffing shortages in licensed programs, limit enrollment capacity for families in need of care, and create administrative burdens for small child care businesses.

When hiring is delayed, classrooms may operate below capacity, waitlists grow longer, and working parents struggle to secure reliable care. SB359 will help streamline the background check process by reducing unnecessary administrative barriers and improving coordination within the system. A more efficient process ensures that

qualified individuals can enter the workforce more quickly while maintaining the essential safeguards that protect children.

For early childhood educators—many of whom work in small centers or family child care homes—predictability and timeliness in the clearance process are essential. Providers operate on thin margins and cannot afford prolonged vacancies. Streamlining the process supports workforce stability, reduces turnover caused by onboarding delays, and strengthens Maryland’s overall child care infrastructure.

Importantly, SEIU Local 500 supports reforms that enhance efficiency without compromising safety. Children’s well-being must remain paramount. SB359 advances both safety and operational effectiveness by modernizing procedures that currently slow down hiring without improving outcomes.

At a time when Maryland continues to face child care workforce shortages, policies that responsibly reduce barriers to employment are critical. HB 635 is a practical solution that benefits providers, employees, and families alike.

For these reasons, SEIU Local 500 respectfully urges the Committee to issue a favorable report on Senate Bill 359.

Thank you for your time and consideration.