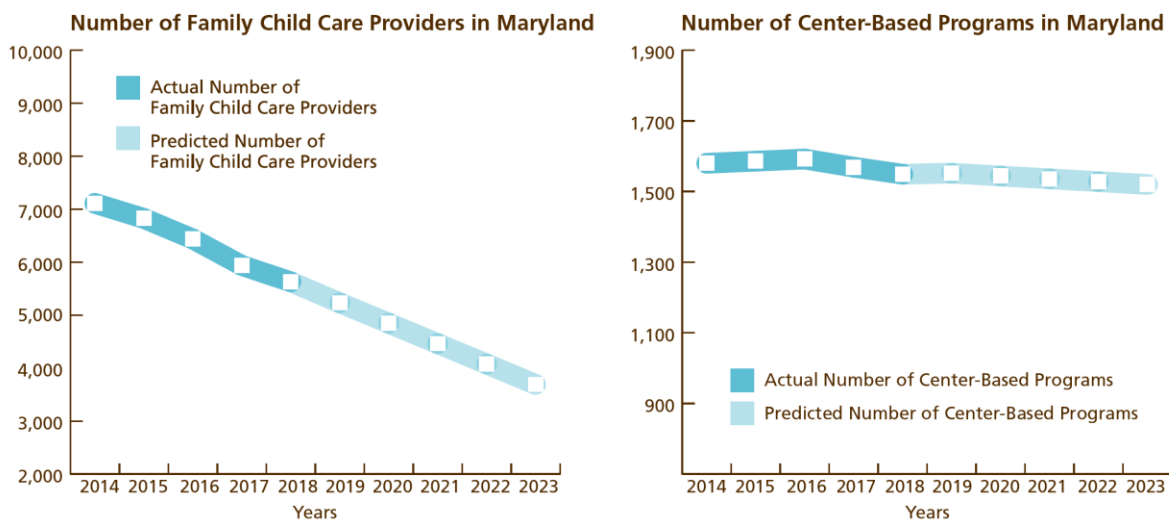




House Ways & Means Committee
 Delegate Anne R. Kaiser, Chair
 General Assembly of Maryland
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 Annapolis, MD 21401
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Feb 18, 2020

How many child care providers will there be in Maryland in the future?



Children in the 0-4 age group are projected to **increase by about 15.8%** from 2019 to 2023. Meanwhile the number of licensed family care providers is projected to **decrease by 29%** while the number of child care centers is projected to **decrease by 2%**. -Trends in Child Care 2019, p.3, Maryland Family Network

HB0396 Child Care Centers - Early Childhood Screening for Developmental Disabilities

Dear Delegate Kaiser,

I write to express my opposition to HB0396. I want to be clear that I understand the positive intent of this bill and desire to better support families and children. However, we are in a child care crisis. We need more resources, not more mandates.

For the past 15 years, I have been involved in child care and early childhood development as both a parent and then as the president of Rock Spring Children's Center. Rock

Spring is a nonprofit child care & preschool facility that attempts to meet the needs of the families and children in our community with spots for 176 infants through pre-k children. As a former representative of child care providers in both elected and appointed capacities, I have testified regularly about the critical need for more state funding to better support parental needs for quality child care, to bolster & expand child care businesses, and to improve the wages of child care workers.

It is not widely understood that we have a child care crisis that has been building for years and that we have no comprehensive plan to fix. You can see from the chart at the top of my testimony that Maryland has had sharp declines in the number of licensed family child care providers. Behind the more moderate declining trend in the numbers of licensed center based programs are alarming warning signs – an aging group of providers and staff anxiously hoping to just make it to retirement, child care businesses struggling to make their budgets work, staff shortages with a lack of younger people entering the field, and a sense that those of us who work in child care need to be making backup plans for alternate livelihoods.

The increase to Maryland's minimum wage is significantly increasing the costs for many programs across the state and parents aren't able to absorb the necessary tuition increases. The potential loss of four year olds to the school system for public pre-kindergarten programs that hurts our business models and that we do not believe is developmentally appropriate for our kids is even further distressing. Increases to the state's child care subsidy program from additional federal funding still aren't enough to fully cover the costs of quality child care and only help those families at the lower range of the income scale. There seems to be a shortfall projected for the State's child care subsidy funding and this is a repeating pattern that makes it difficult for child care programs and parents to rely on it. Meanwhile, the cost of care continues to increase beyond the ability of most Maryland families to pay it.

As to the substantive issue of developmental screenings, it is a sensitive issue for many reasons. Although some child care providers have the resources to conduct developmental screenings, not all programs are so fortunate. Screenings require staff time to administer them by someone who has been trained in the screening tool. The screening needs to be scored and then the results need to be discussed with the parents. While some providers have the experience and communication skills to make this process worthwhile, some do not. Parents sometimes are resistant to discussing the results with a child care provider and the process can create stress in the relationship. Pediatricians conduct developmental screenings as well and are better able to address parent concerns with medical advice and the latest intervention options.

At Rock Spring, we have hired an outside group of child development experts to come to the school to evaluate children and serve as a resource to parents. We did this because there is often a shortage of resources for parents to turn to that are available and affordable. Working

with our experts, we also found a significant difference between what will get flagged on a developmental screening and what will qualify children for early intervention services. Providers will direct parents to one of the child development referral entities where the parents will be told that no problem exists. This can cause further damage to the relationship between provider and parent. Additionally, the referral entities are already overloaded and underfunded. A significant increase in referrals is only going to increase this problem, leaving our parents with few options to do anything about the results of the screening. How is this what is best for kids and families? Our experts suggested it would be a much more efficient use of resources to increase the number of staff at the referral entities who would be available to visit child care programs, conduct observations, and consult with staff about intervention strategies.

I am also concerned that the fiscal note significantly underestimates the cost of this bill. While it was good to see some estimate of the cost to providers in terms of the screening tool and training, there was no calculation of the cost of the time that it would take for the child care provider to administer the screening and then have a conference with the parents to discuss the results. This is much more than the cost of the tool and training. Many programs struggle to have hire and retain enough staff to meet the required ratios for the classrooms. This bill requires each program to have an extra staff member to be available to conduct the screening and meet with parents.

I'd also like to address what bills like this do to the morale of child care providers. We are in the field working each day trying to meet the needs of the kids and families in our communities. It is a daunting job. We accept pay that is much lower than the value of what we do and we get very little respect for our efforts. We are constantly bombarded with implied and direct messaging that we aren't good enough, aren't valued, and are just resources to be exploited and told what to do. However, most of us have been doing this for a very long time and stay in the business because of our commitment to the children and families of our State. I know that is something we have in common with many of our legislators.

I thank you so much for your dedication to our State and to our families and for your consideration of my concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'SR', is positioned above the typed name.

Shaun M. Rose
President, Rock Spring Children's Center
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