

ALICE CAIN
Legislative District 30A
Anne Arundel County

Ways and Means Committee

Education Subcommittee

Election Law Subcommittee



The Maryland House of Delegates
6 Bladen Street, Room 154
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
410-841-3211 · 301-858-3211
800-492-7122 Ext. 3211
Alice.Cain@house.state.md.us

THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**Testimony of Delegate Alice Cain
Before the House Ways and Means Committee**

**In Support of HB1255
Education - Dual Language Learner Pre-Kindergarten Grant Program**

**March 6, 2020
1:00pm**

Chair Kaiser, Vice Chair Washington, and Members of the Ways and Means Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on a bill that will make a difference for some of Maryland's youngest learners.

Research is clear that the best time to learn a language is in early childhood, when a child's brain is growing fastest.¹ It also shows that bilingual pre-k is effective due to early exposure to a second language. Unfortunately, only five states have strong bilingual pre-k policies, and Maryland is not one of them.²

An opportunity gap exists between students entering Kindergarten as English Language Learners (or ELLs) and their English-speaking peers. According to the 2018-19 Maryland Kindergarten Readiness Assessment Report, only 22% of ELLs entering kindergarten demonstrate readiness, compared to 52% for English speaking students.

There are approximately 15,000 three and four-year-old English Language Learners in Maryland.³ This bill creates a pilot program to expand language learning support for some of these students and then evaluates this effort to determine whether it's effective in helping them enter kindergarten as prepared as their English-speaking peers.

¹ Harvard University <http://developingchild.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Enhancing-and-Practicing-Executive-Function-Skills-with-Children-from-Infancy-to-Adolescence-1.pdf>
Trinity University <https://discover.trinitydc.edu/continuing-education/2014/02/26/importance-of-language-why-learning-a-second-language-is-important/>

² National Institute for Early Education Research, Special Report: Supporting Dual Language Learners in State-Funded Preschool, http://nieer.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/YB2017_DLL-Special-Report.pdf

³ Hunt Institute and Maryland Report Card <http://www.hunt-institute.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Hunt-Institute-Early-Childhood-Landscape-Maryland.pdf> and <https://reportcard.msde.maryland.gov/Graphs/#/Demographics/StudentPopulation/17/1/99/XXXX>

The bilingual pilot program is based on recommendations from the National Institute for Early Education Research and would provide a grant to a pre-k provider to:

- Develop best practice guidelines for supporting ELL children and families
- Ensure training and/or certification in ELL instruction for pre-k teachers
- Support schools in better communicating with parents in their home language
- Support school districts in screening and assessing pre-k students in their home language to improve the accuracy of information

These activities complement the pre-k programs established by the *Blueprint for Maryland's Future*, and help to ensure that our youngest English Language Learners benefit from this expansion of pre-k.

This bill is supported by many organizations:

- Advocates for Children and Youth
- Anne Arundel County Public Schools
- Casa de Maryland
- Education Trust
- Legislative Latino Caucus

With quality bilingual education, our students are more likely to enter kindergarten ready to succeed, more likely to master basic skills, and ultimately more likely to graduate.

I respectfully request that you issue a favorable report on this bill.