



To: The Honorable Chair, Senator Paul G. Pinsky, and members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

From: Melissa S. Rock, Birth to Three Strategic Initiative Director

Re.: **HB 392: Child Care Centers - Early Childhood Screening for Developmental Disabilities**

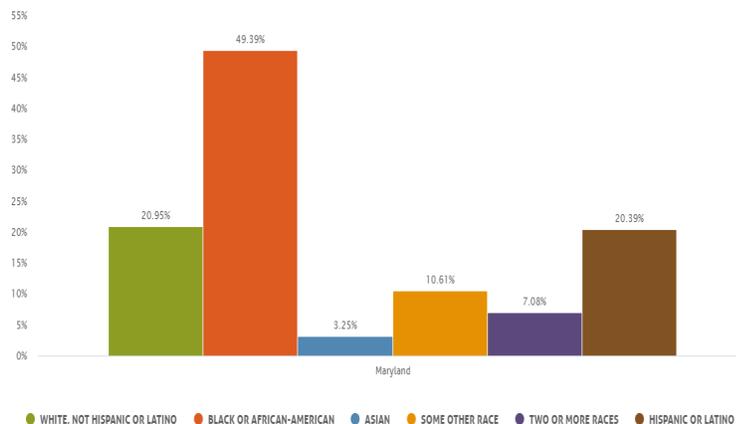
Date: March 25, 2021

Position: **SUPPORT**

With the help of the increased ability to scan brains, we now know that 85% of brain development happens before a child turns 3 years old. That brain development is highly influenced by a young child's experiences. For children experiencing toxic levels of stress—like those children living in poverty, or exposed to violence, their brains do not develop at the same rate because of the impact on their bodies responding to that toxic stress. For this reason, it is critical that we are intervening for young children who need services as early as possible, so that brain development is not interrupted.

Unlike school aged children, for young children, there are not many touchpoints where professionals can identify issues such as developmental disabilities. While pediatricians can screen for these, those visits are often rushed, and only twice per year once the child turns two. **HB 392 will ensure that licensed childcare providers are equipped to do these screenings which will go a far way towards ensuring that there is early detection of developmental disabilities for young children.** By detecting these issues early, accommodations can be made to limit the negative impact on the child.

Given the impact toxic stress can have on brain development, these early screenings will be especially beneficial for impoverished children, who are more likely to have that toxic stress lead to developmental delays. Epigenetics also disproportionately impact low income children and children of color where the impact of trauma on earlier generations impact the DNA of future generations. In Maryland, there are 51,000 children ages birth through 5 years old living under the Federal Poverty Level.¹ This represents 12% of Maryland's Children birth through 5 years old.² The table highlights the racial disparities in poverty rates caused by systemic and institutional racism for all children in Maryland under age 18.³



Child Poverty Status By Race (Percent) - 2019

Advocates for Children and Youth
 KIDS COUNT Data Center, datacenter.kidscount.org
 A project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation

We urge this committee to issue a favorable report on HB 392 to ensure that childcare facilities are better equipped to screen young children for developmental delays and thus allow families to receive essential interventions earlier.

¹ <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/5650-children-in-poverty-by-age-group?loc=22&loct=2#detailed/2/22/false/1729,37,871,870,573,869,36,868,867,133/17,18,36/12263,12264>

² Id.

³ <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/bar/8538-child-poverty-status-by-race?loc=22&loct=2#2/any/false/1729/4406,3303,3304,2161,3305,3306,3307,3301,4551/17226>