



Maryland Association for the Education of Young Children

Testimony in Support of HB 392
“Child Care Centers -- Early Childhood Screening and Assistance”
Submitted to the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs
Committee
March 25, 2021

Position: Favorable with Amendments

The Maryland Association for the Education of Young Children (MDAEYC) supports HB 392 with amendments. MDAEYC believes in the value of developmental screening in child care centers and early childhood education programs. We respectfully suggest that the bill be amended to include funds to cover child care providers’ time in training and for administering the developmental screening.

MDAEYC is a professional association of 1,500 early childhood educators, allied professionals, and families. We promote high-quality early learning for all children, birth through age 8, by connecting early childhood education practice, policy, and research. We advance a diverse, dynamic early childhood profession and support all who care for, educate, and work on behalf of young children. Many of our members are educators working in child care centers or family child care homes.

We support HB 392 because we know the critical role early screening can play in young children’s healthy development. Developmental screening is an effective, efficient way for professionals to check a child’s development, help parents celebrate their child’s milestones, and help identify developmental concerns early while guiding parents to needed resources. It’s also an essential first step toward identifying children with delays or disorders in the critical early years before they start school. Conducting these screenings early in a child’s life allows us the opportunity to provide children and families with support during the critical years of development, producing more significant gains in student achievement and saving tax-payer dollars later down the road to implement remediation services.

MDAEYC also supports the role that early childhood educators / child care providers can play in administering developmental screenings. As early childhood educators, many of our board leadership and our members have personal experience administering developmental screening tools such as the Ages and Stages Questionnaires, Third Edition (ASQ-3). Early childhood educators/providers often have children in their care 11 hours a day. This time spent interacting with young children allows for an unparalleled opportunity to gain extensive knowledge of and insights into



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the development of the children they serve. Developmental screening allows educators access to a valid and reliable tool, opening the door for important and productive conversations with the child's parents on what is typical for a peer in their age range. We have found that the most effective screening tools are easy and quick to use, can be easily completed by a parent or provider, and can easily be scored.

MDAEYC respectfully suggests that the Committee add an amendment to include funding to support staff training and staff time administering developmental screenings. While MDAEYC believes that child care providers are an appropriate professional to complete a developmental screening, administering and scoring screenings takes time, and programs may need to dedicate additional staff to the regular classroom while an educator completes the screening. Child care educators also need to take training in scoring the screening tools. While we recognize that screenings are critical, the weight cannot be carried on the backs of an already over-burdened and under-resourced profession.

While developmental *evaluations* should be completed by developmental pediatricians or other specialized experts, it is appropriate for early childhood educators /child care providers to complete developmental *screenings*, as they are designed to be administered by a much broader range of professionals, or by parents.

These screening tools are completed in collaboration with the parents, recognizing that parents are their child's first and best teacher, and help guide powerful conversations about their child's strengths and needs. Ultimately, parents have the right to accept or deny the referral for early intervention services allowing the parent to still have the final say over whether their child receives services. In some instances, the tool may show a concerned parent that the child is right where the child needs to be and that no referral is needed, providing the family with comfort and reassurance.

The past year has been difficult for us all, but especially for young children. We have yet to see the effect of the pandemic on children's growth and development; that is why now it is more important than ever that we take proactive steps to ensure all children have what they need to be successful. We hope that the State will see the importance of this initiative and see that the cost to intervene early is much more affordable than the cost to intervene later. For that reason, we request your support for this bill if it also is amended to include funds for the staff time to administer the screenings.

If you have any questions, please contact: Christina Lopez, President, at christina.lopez@mdaeyc.org or 301-751-1626.



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