



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 776: State Department of Education - Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Project - Study and Report**

Date: March 25, 2021

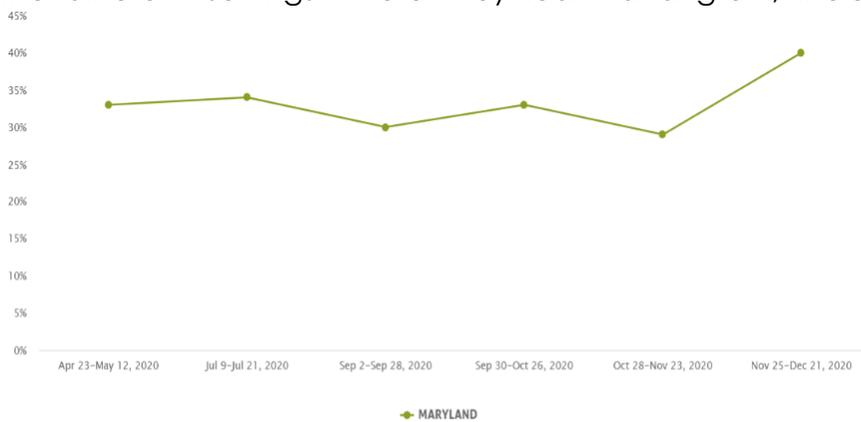
Position: **SUPPORT**

As Jack P. Shonkoff, M.D., Director of the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University explains “Mental health can’t be separated out from cognitive development and language development and...social competence and they all have their roots early on in a very sturdy or a weak foundation....Most potential mental health problems will not become mental health problems if we respond to them early.”<sup>1</sup> Early childhood mental health consultation (ECMHC) is a key tool we have for responding early to potential mental health problems in young children and ensuring they do not become serious problems.

The Maryland State Department of Education’s (MSDE’s) Division of Early Childhood and Division of Early Intervention and Special Education Services’ “Maryland Infant & Early Childhood Mental Health Support Services Program: *Practice Standards & Recommendations*” dated 2020 explains that “[Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation] IECMHC is a prevention-based service that pairs a mental health consultant and/or a behavioral specialist with early childhood education professionals who work with infants and young children, and their families in the different settings where they learn and grow, including childcare, preschool, and their

homes.”<sup>2</sup> When young children are exhibiting behavior problems, a childcare provider can call Maryland’s IECMHC program and a consultant will assess whether the child needs services or if changes at the childcare setting will solve the behavior issue.

The COVID-19 pandemic makes Maryland’s IECMH program more important than ever. As the graph to the left indicates, almost half of adults surveyed in Maryland indicated that the children in their households were experiencing anxiety.<sup>3</sup> Routine is particularly



Adults Living In Households With Children Who Felt Nervous, Anxious Or On Edge For More Than Half Of The Days Or Nearly Every Day In The Past Week (Percent)

National KIDS COUNT  
 KIDS COUNT Data Center: [datacenter.kidscount.org](http://datacenter.kidscount.org)  
 A project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation

<sup>1</sup> <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/inbrief-early-childhood-mental-health-video/>

<sup>2</sup> Sweeney Wasserman, K., Candelaria, M., Hanna, T., & Guerra, J. (2020). Maryland Infant & Early Childhood Mental Health Support Services: Practice Standards and Recommendations at p. 5.

<sup>3</sup> <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/line/10893-adults-living-in-households-with-children-who-felt-nervous->

important for young children's social emotional health, and thousands of children across Maryland have had their childcare providers change. As of June 30, 2019, there were 6,917 licensed childcare providers across Maryland (5,360 home-based childcare providers and 1,557 center-based providers).<sup>4</sup> However, as of May 8<sup>th</sup>, 2020, only 55% (or 3,778) of those childcare providers were caring for children.<sup>5</sup> **HB 776 will help ensure that Maryland's IECMHC project meets the needs of Maryland's children and families.**

HB 776's inclusion of an assessment of the staffing qualifications will help ensure that Maryland's IECMHC project will have the best possible outcomes for Maryland's children and families. MSDE's "Maryland Infant & Early Childhood Mental Health Support Services Program: *Practice Standards & Recommendations*" cited above states that "Outcomes from a 2019 analyses of data from the ECHMC Project indicate that **outcomes at the child and classroom levels in Early Childhood Education (ECE) settings are stronger when consultation is provided by licensed mental health professionals** (Candelaria, et al., 2019)."<sup>6</sup> (Emphasis added.) In its 2020 Legislative Session, Virginia passed a joint resolution to study ECMHC, and they determined that their ECMH consultants would all "hold a master's degree in social work, psychology, school counseling, or related field" and "have at least 2-3 years of experience working as a mental health professional with young children and families."<sup>7</sup> **ACY urges this committee to issue a favorable report on HB 776 to ensure that Maryland's Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Project is as robust as it needs to be to meet the social emotional needs of our youngest Marylanders.**

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[anxious-or-on-edge-for-more-than-half-of-the-days-or-nearly-every-day-in-the-past-week?loc=22&loct=2#2/22/false/2047,2042,2034,2033,2032,2028,2027,2002,1997,1996/asc/any/21180](https://www.marylandfamilynetwork.org/sites/default/files/2020-03/2020_MFN_Demographics.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.marylandfamilynetwork.org/sites/default/files/2020-03/2020\\_MFN\\_Demographics.pdf](https://www.marylandfamilynetwork.org/sites/default/files/2020-03/2020_MFN_Demographics.pdf) at p. 5.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.marylandfamilynetwork.org/sites/default/files/2020-09/2020%20MFN%20Caring%20During%20Covid%20%28bg%29%201.3%20Pages%5B1%5D.pdf> at p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> Sweeney Wasserman, K., Candelaria, M., Hanna, T., & Guerra, J. (2020). Maryland Infant & Early Childhood Mental Health Support Services: Practice Standards and Recommendations at p. 4.

<sup>7</sup> "House Joint Resolution No. 51: Feasibility Study of Developing an Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Program: Report Prepared for the Governor and General Assembly," December 18, 2020 at p. 29.