



To: The Honorable Chair, Delegate Shane E. Pendergrass, and members of the Health and Government Operations Committee  
The Honorable Chair, Anne R. Kaiser, and members of the Ways and Means Committee

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

Re.: **HB 783: Workgroup on Screening Related to Adverse Childhood Experiences**

Date: February 23, 2021

Position: **SUPPORT**

ACEs, or Adverse Childhood Experiences, are a category of early life traumas which negatively impact long-term health, prosperity, and social mobility outcomes.<sup>i</sup> ACEs encompass traumatic experiences at all levels of severity and include: emotional, physical, and sexual abuse, emotional and physical neglect, domestic and intimate partner violence, illicit substance use in the home, untreated mental illness in the home, the incarceration of a household member, and the separation and/or divorce of adult caregivers.<sup>ii</sup> ACEs have the potential to hinder an individual's neurological, socio-behavioral, and emotional development, all of which have repercussions for students' well-being and their ultimate academic success.

ACEs don't target individuals based on race, gender, ability status, sexuality, nationality, socioeconomic status, or any of the identity markers we typically use when disaggregating data. The groundbreaking 1998 study found that ACEs are relatively common--**about 67% of survey participants had at least one ACE.**<sup>iii</sup> Unfortunately, the study also demonstrated that when an individual had more ACEs, the odds of them experiencing negative outcomes like alcohol and substance abuse, depression, adolescent parenthood, and many other issues also increased. Having 3 or more ACEs is typically the threshold for these negative outcomes. More than 40% of Maryland children have at least one ACE—**15.4% have had two or more.**<sup>iv</sup> Please find the attached county-level ACEs data from the 2018-2019 Maryland Youth Risk Behavioral Survey.<sup>v</sup>

Given how high the prevalence of ACEs is among Maryland's children, it is critical that we increase our screenings for ACEs in young children, to ensure they get the support they need to prevent these ACEs from adversely impacting their development. 85% of a person's brain development happens in their first three years. A strong attachment to a caregiver can buffer the impact ACEs can have on a young child's brain development and ensure the develop the social emotional skills they need to succeed. HB 783's Workgroup on Screening Related to ACEs will ensure this increased screening for ACEs can be implemented across Maryland. **ACY urges these committees to issue a favorable report on HB 783 to ensure children with ACEs get the support they need so those ACEs do not lead to dangerous behavior and negative health outcomes.**

<sup>i</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

[https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childabuseandneglect/acestudy/index.html?CDC\\_AA\\_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fviolenceprevention%2Facestudy%2Findex.html](https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childabuseandneglect/acestudy/index.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fviolenceprevention%2Facestudy%2Findex.html)

<sup>ii</sup> Id.

<sup>iii</sup> Id.

<sup>iv</sup> Baltimore Sun. *More than 40 percent of Maryland children experience traumatic events.* October 19, 2017.

<sup>v</sup> Jallah, Nikardi, MPH, "Adverse Childhood Experiences on the Maryland Youth Risk Behavior Survey/Youth Tobacco Survey (YRBS/YTS) (Frederick & Baltimore City Examples)" presentation to Maryland's State Council on Child Abuse and Neglect, December 3, 2020. The Maryland Youth Risk Behavior Survey is an anonymous survey and the 2018-2019 data included 41,091 surveys from students across Maryland.