

*Joint Testimony Concerning HB 776: "State Department of Education - Infant and Early Childhood
Mental Health Consultation Project - Study and Report"
Submitted to the House Ways & Means Committee, February 12, 2021
by the directors of the MSDE Funded Consultation Programs*

Position: Favorable

We are writing to express our appreciation to the subcommittee for today's hearing on HB 776: "State Department of Education – Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Project – Study and Report" and for their attention to this important program which works to support the mental health needs of our youngest students in their earliest educational settings throughout the state. **As the Directors of the programs that make up the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) Division of Early Childhood funded project, we are writing jointly to express our favorable support of the bill as proposed.**

Additionally, we want to acknowledge that our absence today during the subcommittee's hearing is only due to a previously scheduled training commitment today. We, along with 60 other peers in the project across the state, had committed to a two-day training with the Indigo Cultural Center which is part of the nationally-funded Center of Excellence on Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (COE). This training and ongoing work with the Indigo Cultural Center and the COE is an effort to support intentionally addressing equity and racism through our consultation efforts. We know through both national research and local implementation that suspension and expulsion in classrooms and childcare centers for our youngest have significant impact and that inequities in race show up for 2, 3 and 4 year old students.

Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (IECMHC) is a prevention-based service that pairs a mental health consultant with families and adults who work with infants and young children in the different settings where they learn and grow, such as childcare, preschool, and their home. The aim is to build adults' capacity to strengthen and support the healthy social and emotional development of children — early and before intervention is needed. At its core, IECMHC is intended to create fundamental shifts in early childhood professionals' beliefs, attitudes, and practices to support more effective caregiving for all children, regardless of race, gender, class, or a myriad of other factors.

As you know, Maryland was a leader in adaption of the Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation, with the initial pilot program in 2002, and has remained committed to utilizing our effective programs as a key strategy to promote positive social emotional development and address behavioral concerns in young children. Our programs serve our communities in a myriad of ways. Childcare providers and parents across the state can access IECMHC services free of charge throughout the state of Maryland.

Services include:

- Observation and assessment of children and the childcare environment using research-based tools
- Partnering with childcare providers to deliver training, mentoring, and coaching to help create environments that better support the social and emotional needs of young children
- Increasing childcare staff skills in addressing the social and emotional needs of children to improve readiness for school
- Supporting childcare providers to help retain and serve children with behavioral and mental health needs
- Supporting positive relationships with providers and families

Since March of last year, work and lives were significantly disrupted by the COVID-19 global pandemic that sent children and child care providers behind masks and closed many classrooms, we have seen increased attention to the potential impact and reach of consultation. Supporting the child care workforce – which is in many ways at ground zero for this pandemic – includes navigating issues of classroom hygiene and safety, the economic impact of the pandemic, and the extended stress regarding delivery of services in a limited nature. All of this has both impacted and highlighted the importance of early childhood and family-focused work and settings, as we all worked to engage and support families through zoom calls and computer screens.

We are appreciative of the bill's effort to study the impact of our work, as well as identify opportunities for growth and expansion, as each of our programs deal with issues of wait lists and underserved children, families and childcare providers based on flat funding and increased population demands.

Again, thank you for your commitment to our state's youngest students, their families, and the early childhood educators that so dedicatedly serve them.

Sincerely,

Denise Taylor-Turner, Director
Project Right Steps, *Serving: Kent, Queen Anne's, Caroline, Talbot and Dorchester Counties*

Germaine Adams, Director
CHAMPS, *Serving: Anne Arundel County*

Heather Glass, Director
APPLES (Early Childhood Destination: Inclusion), *Serving: Garrett, Allegheny and Washington Counties*

Kelly Hutter, Director
Project First Choice, *Serving: Calvert, Charles and St., Mary's Counties*

Morgan Horvath, Director
Project ACT Early Childhood Consultation Services, *Serving: Baltimore County, Cecil and Harford Counties*

Nancy Pelton, Director
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Patty Morison, Director
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