



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

Position: Favorable

Maryland Family Network (MFN) strongly supports HB 776. This legislation would require the Maryland State Department of Education to evaluate the need for infant and early childhood mental health care and support services and the capacity of the existing Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Project (IECMHCP) to meet that need.

MFN has worked since 1945 to improve the availability and quality of child care and early childhood education as well as other supports for children and families in Maryland. We have been active in state and federal debates on child care policy and are strongly committed to ensuring that children, along with their parents, have access to high-quality, affordable programs and educational opportunities.

Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation is a prevention-based service. It pairs a mental health consultant and/or a behavioral specialist with early education professionals who work with infants and young children (and their families) in the different settings where they learn and grow, including child care, preschool, and their homes. Maryland has embraced a multi-disciplinary early intervention strategy that has demonstrated outstanding success in preventing expulsions from preschool settings. IECMHCP has also been shown to improve classroom climate, improve teacher confidence, and decrease challenging behavior in children.

Preventive measures and early treatment delivered through IECMHCP have proven to be highly successful – and cost effective. The keys are starting early with services and supports and, whenever possible, providing them within the community, in a natural environment such as the child’s home or child care setting. Maryland’s tiered model of service delivery is aligned with the nationally vetted IECMH consultant competencies and qualifications developed by SAMHSA’s Center of Excellence for Infant & Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation.

In many cases, adjustments to the early education program itself provide resolutions. Sometimes children require individual interventions or referrals. Some forms of treatment, not surprisingly, are vastly more expensive. But by following the principles of prevention and early intervention, IECMHCP works to ensure that problems that can be dealt with early don’t intensify. The benefits to be gained from community-based mental health services for young children – in both human and fiscal terms – are enormous.

HB 776 offers an opportunity for the State to examine the feasibility of expanding IECMHCP and providing these vital services to more early education programs and more young children. For this reason, MFN respectfully urges the Committee’s favorable consideration.

