



ARCO IRIS

BILINGUAL CHILDREN'S CENTER

February 3, 2021

Dear Delegate Solomon and Members of the Committee:

My name is Carolina Reyes, and I am owner and Director of Arco Iris Bilingual Children's Center in Laurel Prince George's county.

I come to you today to re-emphasize the importance for you to pass Bill 608, which will help alleviate the childcare community.

Did you know that majority of centers and family childcare are owned and run by minority women? I am one of them: an immigrant who serves a diverse group of families who value high quality childcare and bilingual education.

This pandemic has brought a heavy burden on our shoulders and the childcare community is trying hard to remain viable. We are educating young children in a high quality and safe environment so that they are academically, socially, and emotionally ready for kindergarten. Childcare matters, we care for our community's children; we are essential to our society. But we need help.

I want to share the issues I have been facing since I reopened last August 2020.

- My enrollment is only at 33% capacity. 19 children out of a maximum of 57.
- Every month my rent accumulates since I am not able to pay the whole amount.
- Two of the four classroom are closed temporarily.
- I have converted a classroom for school age children so that I can help some of my families, teacher's children, and my own children with distance learning.
- As a small business owner, I have implemented policies to maintain the viability of my center, such as charging tuition despite having constant closures. This is a big impact for my families, but necessary to remain in business. Nevertheless, when we do close I can see that many of my families with diverse economic backgrounds couldn't pay because they depend on their daily working wages. So, for how much longer can I continue doing this before families abandon childcare completely?
- Just recently two families left my center because due to a recent incident with someone having COVID-19. Because of this incident, I had to close for two weeks – which is incredibly burdensome for working families such as theirs.

- Teachers left the field after Covid-19 arrived. Prior to Covid-19, AIBCC had 9 teachers, and now we only have three.

This Pandemic has placed a heavy burden onto many organizations and small businesses like mine. At this time, I must face the issue of finding another location from which to rent or just close my business permanently. The current place from where I rent can no longer maintain our presence there.

We are professionals who love what we do because we believe strongly that the education of small children will better ensure successful leaders for our nation. But we cannot do this alone. We need you. We need your support; not just financial, but also moral. The pandemic has brought the opportunity for us to say - **LOUDLY AND CLEARLY** - that **CHILDCARE IS ESSENTIAL** in our society. Now is the time to start making a difference. Maryland can be one of the first states to show the rest of the country that we can establish this by working together.

Once again, thank you for reading my testimony about the issues childcare is facing. My families, my children, my teachers, and I need you.

Sincerely,

Carolina Reyes, Director
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