

February 3, 2021

**Testimony Concerning H.B 608, the Early Childhood Education - Child Care Provider Support Grant Program (The Child Care Provider Support Act)
Submitted to the House Committee on Ways and Means**

Prior to the COVID-19 crisis, Prince George's County was home to 747 family child care programs and 377 centers. I am writing to you today on behalf of one of those programs: Jaycees Early Learning Center located in Fort Washington, Maryland 20744.

When Governor Hogan ordered the closure of child care centers and family child care homes due to COVID-19, the Maryland State Department of Education created an application process for child care programs to be available to serve essential workers. **Our 1,124 licensed child care programs shrank to 435 programs for essential workers only.** With the permission to re-open granted later in 2020, all area child care programs (whether they stayed opened or closed temporarily) continue to climb back, under-enrolled, with staffing challenges, and the continued stress and fear of COVID-19.

We have an opportunity to address the child care crisis thanks to Delegate Solomon introducing HB 608, the Child Care Provider Support Act. This legislation calls for flexible grants for licensed child care centers and family child care homes in the Maryland EXCELS program.

I am a Director of a licensed program and we are presently level 4 Maryland Excel. Our program is also accredited. The licensed capacity of our program is 117 and we presently have 48 children enrolled. Prior COVID-19 the enrollment was 98. We had 21 staff and currently have 15 that includes me, Assistant Director and the janitor.

The enrollment has decreased as well as the staff however the utilities, supplies, mortgage and maintenance has not decreased. We are using more supplies with less children. It would be such a great help through a flexible grant to help offset the cost. This grant would help the extra expense COVID-19 has cost the center. Prices on all supplies have increased during this pandemic and we are struggling to make payroll and keeping the center safe. To continue to operate a quality program it is of extreme importance to get financial assistance immediately.

Child care in Prince George County was in crisis prior to COVID-19 presenting its challenges. Regulated child care, both family child care and center-based programs, had been on a steady decline in our county since 2015. The economic impact on child care has been devastating.

There is no time to lose. Each day brings a new challenge for licensed child care programs and we are grateful for your leadership. We must stabilize the child care sector and the well-being of people who work in child care. We must also rebuild child care better than before. Together, we can do this. Thank you for supporting the Child Care Provider Support Act. Please contact me if you have any questions or would like to talk about ideas for supporting child care in Maryland. I can be reached at (301) 248-2185 or (301) 248-2449.

Sincerely,

Deborah A. Williams
Director