



**DATE:** February 16, 2022                      **COMMITTEE:** Senate Budget and Taxation  
**BILL NO:** Senate Bill 480  
**BILL TITLE:** Child Care Stabilization Grant Program and Child Care Expansion Grant Program -  
Established  
**POSITION:** Support

**Kennedy Krieger Institute supports Senate Bill 480 - Child Care Stabilization Grant Program and Child Care Expansion Grant Program - Established**

**Bill Summary:**

SB480 establishes a Child Care Stabilization Grant Program at the Maryland Department of Education. This program will provide financial support to licensed child care providers in the State that are in danger of closing within the next 12 months because of financial hardship.

**Background:**

At Kennedy Krieger Institute, we have multiple, high quality evidence informed programs in early childhood education serving "at risk" and medically complex children.

Our Programs include:

**PACT: Helping Children with Special Needs, Inc.,** the only child care centers in the Baltimore Metropolitan area for young children who are medically fragile, and for and infants and toddlers who are homeless.

**World of Care Medical Child Care:** Children, ages birth to five years, who need daily nursing care and specialized equipment receive high-quality childcare at the World of Care Medical Child Care center. Comprehensive services include daily skilled nursing care/interventions, occupational, physical, and speech therapy. At present, World of Care serves 85 children and their families.

**Therapeutic Nursery for Homeless Infants and Toddlers:** This program is the only early Head Start in Baltimore providing specialized attachment-based, trauma-informed care and education for infants and toddlers whose families are currently living in homeless shelters or transitioning back to the community. The Therapeutic Nursery also provides research-based mental health interventions for parents.

**Center for Autism and Related Disorders (CARD) Pre-K and Model Inclusion Child Care:** serves children ages 3, 4 and 5-years old is a full-day program uses the Connect 4 Learning Pre-K curriculum, a National Science Foundation-supported program. The Pre-K Program provides a safe learning environment with a low staff-to-student ratio that allows us to meet the learning and emotional needs of each child. The Model Inclusion Child Care program serves children ages 4 and 5 years. Children spend part of the day acting as a peer model for children with autism during assigned preschool groups led by certified speech-language pathologists. Both co-located in Northwest Baltimore City on the Kennedy Krieger Greenspring Campus.

**Rationale:**

At Kennedy Krieger Institute, we have a unique understanding of the positive, long-term impacts that investing in early childhood care (ECE) and education has on children's development. Specifically, studies have found

benefits to academic, social, emotional, and behavioral functioning for children who attend ECE programs<sup>1 2,3</sup>, and these benefits are sustained over time.<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, in-person evidence-based, high-quality ECE programs mitigate directly harmful environmental and social impacts on young children by providing developmentally appropriate activities, nutritious meals, family support services that facilitate learning, health, and well-being. In addition, high-quality ECE programs include developmental and health screenings and enriched education experiences that foster a strong foundation for children to meet milestones in a safe environment. High-quality ECE programs build Maryland's economic base by enabling parents to feel comfortable in the workforce, knowing their children are safe, learning, enjoying structured social interactions, and eating nutritious meals and snacks. Research shows that every dollar invested in high-quality ECE programs generates a return of \$7.30 for the community.<sup>4</sup> As such, investing in our youngest children is likely to pay dividends in the future.<sup>5</sup>

Maryland's young children, however, are adversely affected by disruptions to ECE programs from the COVID-19 pandemic and numerous socially determined conditions. As many as 30% to 50% fewer children have been enrolled in high-quality early childhood programs since the pandemic began! Compared to pre-pandemic levels, only 56% of centers are fully operating in January 2021. Quality ECE program closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic result in social isolation, unaddressed loss, grief, and trauma, parental job loss, and family food and housing insecurity. Quality ECE program closures limit children's socio-emotional development and peer interaction. Quality ECE program closures lead to missed well-child visits and developmental screenings and undermine economic stability for working families.

With fewer spaces and fewer centers, children are less likely to receive developmental services and support. Children are already suffering from the impact of pandemic-related ECE program closures. Decreases in children's verbal, motor, and cognitive assessments are reported.<sup>6</sup> Only 61% of Head Start 3-year-olds met readiness measures in FY20, down from 92% in FY17 (MOCFS). Increasing access to high-quality ECE programs for children in Maryland is necessary to address health and education disparities. Children of color are more likely to experience center closures during the pandemic.<sup>7</sup> The expenses related to running a childcare facility can be great, and the pandemic has taken an enormous toll on ECE program providers. Moreover, about 75% of Maryland ECE programs report that they continue to experience staffing shortages and low wages, indicating that continued investments are needed in this sector.<sup>8</sup> In particular, the omicron variant has brought further stress and uncertainty to many facets of society, including childcare centers, and has reminded us that the pandemic is not over. Other variants could emerge that could further disrupt the lives of our young children and families.<sup>9</sup>

Overall, the success of high-quality, evidence-based ECE programs is vital for the success of all Marylanders. Having an established stabilization fund to keep high-quality ECE programs' doors open is fundamental to building a thriving Maryland today and for the future.

**Kennedy Krieger Institute strongly supports a favorable report on Senate Bill 480.**

## References

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