

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT

Testimony to the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

In support of

Senate Bill 920: Child Care Scholarship Program- Alterations (Maryland Child Care Working Families Act)

March 15, 2022

Strong Schools Maryland urges a favorable vote on Senate Bill 920: Child Care Scholarship Program- Alterations (Maryland Child Care Working Families Act).

The Blueprint for Maryland's Future envisions a world-class system of public schools for our state's students. Critical to that system is an entryway to early learning opportunities, including a strong, accessible network of high quality child care offerings.

However, despite the benefits of childcare, this resource has not been readily available to everyone who needs it. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, child care providers were inaccessible mainly due to cost and limited availability. In 2017, a family of three in Maryland living at the poverty level would pay 14% of their income despite the fact that, at the time, federal requirements stated copayments should be no more than 7% of a family's income.¹ Since March 2020, the state has seen 855 fewer childcare providers and there have been more shortages in the workforce partially due to families not having reliable child care.²

Senate Bill 920 would:

- Require the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) to create a process that would grant presumptive eligibility for a child care scholarship. Granting presumptive eligibility would increase participation in the program and ensure that marginalized communities (those who are not native English speakers, those experiencing poverty, those with developmental disabilities, etc.) have more equitable access to critical early learning and care opportunities; and
- Eschew racist, inequitable policies by prohibiting MSDE from requiring that a parent pursue/receive child support as a criteria for accessing the benefit.

High quality child care is the foundation to student success in a world class education system. Senate Bill 920 makes equitable access to the Child Care Scholarship Program a priority and is in alignment with the vision of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future. Strong Schools Maryland urges a favorable report on Senate Bill 920.

If you have questions or requests for additional information, you can email:

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¹ Rachel Baye, "Maryland Poor Getting Little Help on Childcare", 2017, <https://www.wypr.org/wypr-news/2017-11-22/maryland-poor-get-little-help-on-childcare>

² Elizabeth Shwe, "Lawmakers Tout Bills to Support Providers and Make Child Care More Affordable, 2022, <https://www.marylandmatters.org/2022/02/11/lawmakers-tout-bills-to-support-providers-and-make-child-care-more-affordable/>

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