



**Testimony in SUPPORT of *House Bill 995 – Early Childhood Development –
Child Care Scholarship Program - Alterations***
Ways and Means Committee
March 4, 2022

The Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Washington (JCRC) serves as the public affairs and community relations arm of the Jewish community. We represent over 100 Jewish organizations and synagogues throughout Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia. The JCRC is strongly committed to cultivating a society based on freedom, justice, and pluralism. We work tirelessly throughout the entire Greater Washington area to advocate for our agencies that serve the most vulnerable residents, support our Jewish day schools, childcare centers and community centers, and campaign for important policy interests on behalf of not only the Jewish community, but for all Marylanders.

The JCRC strongly supports affordable and accessible childcare. This commitment is rooted in the Jewish mandate to champion the poor and the needy. It is also our sense of ethical responsibility to ensure that all parents and their children have the ability to maintain their economic well-being and dignity. The impact of the pandemic on our childcare system can not be underestimated. According to the Maryland Early Childhood Advisory Council, there are 855 fewer childcare providers in Maryland today than in March 2020.

House Bill 995 establishes a simplified process for becoming eligible for the Child Care Scholarship Program. It presumes families who apply for the Program are eligible so that they can immediately enroll while their applications are reviewed. It stipulates that costs during that presumed eligibility period would be paid with federal funds. Currently, it can take up to 90 days for the State to approve a childcare scholarship application. The Bill also would allow families who qualify for temporary cash assistance and supplemental security income to automatically qualify for the Program. Additionally, HB 995 requires the Department to pay childcare providers within 10 days of receipt of their invoice.

The JCRC is committed to streamlining the State's childcare scholarship application process to ensure that it is accessible to all families. In an effort to make childcare not only available, but also affordable, to everyone who needs it, we ask the committee for a favorable report on HB 995.