



Testimony in Support of House Bill 513

Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Program - Established

To: Chair Vanessa Atterbeary and Members of the Ways & Means Committee

From: Demaune A. Millard, President & CEO, Family League of Baltimore

Date: February 17, 2022

Family League of Baltimore (Family League) supports House Bill 513 as it would establish the Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Program within the State Department of Education's Division of Early Childhood Development to promote positive mental and behavioral health practices for young children by providing certain referrals and services for children, families, teachers, and caregivers. This program would establish a new normal for young children and families that need consistent support from mental health professionals.

These last two years being in a pandemic has exacerbated the need for mental health care for infants and children under 6 more than ever. The isolation that children and families have faced has caused daily interactions and transitions to be more difficult than usual. Also, families have had to face a new normal that have caused them to face battles that have not usually been an issue. In Baltimore City, specifically lower-income communities, the access to mental health professionals has proven to be extremely difficult. Over the past year the Early Childhood Advisory Council has held focus groups and one of the issues that was discussed was the need for mental health support for young children and families. The wait time for a referral can take up to 3 months, which is 3 months that additional guidance is not received. This bill would help ease the burden for families and allow centers with eligible children enrolled to provide referrals to gain access to appropriate clinics or programs for assistance with children dealing with developmental, social, emotional, or behavioral health issues.

As the designated Local Management Board for the City of Baltimore, Family League works collaboratively to support data-informed, community-driven solutions to align resources to dismantle systemic barriers that limit the possibilities for children, families, and communities. Our policy focus is also guided by and in support of the Governor's Office of Crime Prevention Youth and Victim Services' Results for Child Well-Being. Through our strategic planning process, we have prioritized three of these results areas, focusing on the success of Baltimore's children in school; the economic stability of families; and the safety of communities for children, youth, and families. We support HB513 in particular because of its alignment with the result areas that work to ensure "Children Are Successful in School."

For more information contact Keontae Kells, Executive Administrator kkells@familyleague.org