
BILL NO: Senate Bill 350
TITLE: Early Childhood Development - Child Care Scholarship Program – Funding
COMMITTEE: Budget & Taxation
HEARING DATE: February 15, 2023
POSITION: **SUPPORT**

The Child Care Scholarship program (CCS) helps parents enter and remain in the workforce by subsidizing the high cost of child care. It gives parents and children access to licensed early education programs. In short, CCS keeps parents earning and children learning.

Maryland has made great strides in the area of childcare affordability, following several major improvements in Maryland's CCS, including legislation sponsored by Sen. King and Del. (now Speaker) Jones mandating that scholarship rates rise from their abysmal level of the 9th percentile of the market to at least the 60th percentile and a regulatory expansion of family income eligibility from approximately \$35,000 for a family of four to \$72,000 for a family of four.

In May 2022, the State made further improvements to CCS. Scholarship rates were increased to the 70th percentile of the market, income eligibility was expanded to just over \$90,000 for a family of four, and parental copayments were eliminated for many families and drastically reduced for all others.

While both State and Federal funds have underwritten these dramatic improvements, that funding is at risk of expiration. The first component of SB350 would make the latest enhancements permanent, not subject to the expiration of ARPA funds. That would ensure critical funding remains stable so that families can continue to rely on this important program.

The second component of the bill would guarantee access to CCS for all families who meet eligibility criteria. Although there is currently no CCS wait list, enrollment freezes have been imposed at different times over the past two decades as a means of cutting costs. Under the bill, MSDE would not be able to unilaterally impose an enrollment freeze. In the event of dire fiscal circumstances, the Governor and the General Assembly would retain the ability to take necessary action—through a BRFA, for example.

Because access to affordable childcare is essential for women's economic security and independence, and for all the aforementioned reasons, the WLC urges a favorable report on SB350.

The Women's Law Center of Maryland is a non-profit legal services organization whose mission is to ensure the physical safety, economic security, and bodily autonomy of women in Maryland. Our mission is advanced through direct legal services, information and referral hotlines, and statewide advocacy.