



March 1, 2023

SB 609

Education - Early Childhood Education Teachers - Qualifications

Senate Education, Energy & the Environment Committee

Position: FAVORABLE

The Maryland Catholic Conference offers this testimony in SUPPORT of Senate Bill 609. The Catholic Conference is the public policy representative of the three (arch)dioceses serving Maryland, which together encompass over one million Marylanders. Statewide, their parishes, schools, hospitals and numerous charities combine to form our state's second largest social service provider network, behind only our state government.

Senate Bill 609 would create a parallel path to early childhood teacher certification. It would authorize prekindergarten alternative teacher preparation programs, leading to a larger well-trained early childhood professional workforce.

Catholic providers have long participated in and supported prekindergarten expansion in Maryland, winning competitive grant bids for programs to provide prekindergarten to four-year-old children whose family income is 300% of the federal poverty level (FPL) or lower. All three of (arch)dioceses serving Maryland have a strong commitment to education and recognize the important role that kindergarten-readiness plays in a child's educational development. Within the State of Maryland, there are approximately 120 prekindergarten programs in Catholic schools or parishes, in addition to Headstart programs. Nearly all are accredited by an accrediting agency recognized by MSDE and a vast majority of them employ state-certified prekindergarten teachers. However, this bill helps to address workforce shortages in early childhood education, while ensuring these programs have continuity in well-trained teachers.

A strong prekindergarten education has been proven to greatly enhance a child's educational trajectory. Like early childhood care, it is also an essential component to supporting strong, economically secure families. Prekindergarten availability also helps to empower working parents with workplace access, an imperative part of combating poverty. For these reasons, the Conference respectfully requests a favorable report on Senate Bill 609.