



**Caring For Maryland's Most
Important Natural Resource™**

Maryland State Child Care Association

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The Maryland State Child Care Association (MSCCA) is a non-profit, statewide, professional association incorporated in 1984 to promote the growth and development of child care and learning centers in Maryland. MSCCA has over 5000 professionals working in the field of early childhood education. We believe children are our most important natural resources and work hard to advocate for children, families and for professionalism within the early childhood community.

Testimony in Favor

HB 888 Education - Prekindergarten Alternative Teacher Preparation Program - Authorization and Reporting
March 1, 2023

Submitted to: Ways and Means Committee

The Maryland State Child Care Association enthusiastically supports HB 888. We applaud the administration and many sponsors for recognizing, as well as addressing numerous educator workforce shortages and barriers impacting our state, our children, our families and our education system.

The Blueprint for Maryland's Future is investing in our youngest citizens. In order to accomplish a Mixed-Delivery Pre-K system, involving both public schools and private community-based childcare providers, will be needed to accommodate the number of students. In order to attain the goals set by the *Blueprint* for mixed delivery, it is imperative to understand the unintended consequences and also the numerous barriers for private providers to achieve the current codified requirements including the teacher state pre-k-3 certification requirements.

The AIB, MSDE and sponsors understand and support the need to create alternative pathways to be inclusive of community-based providers/programs along with addressing the critical workforce shortages. HB 888 will address ways to achieve the goals of the *Blueprint* and takes steps to overcome barriers and inequities without sacrificing quality or closing businesses to participate, which hurts parents who need care for birth to five in Maryland. Child care providers cannot afford to lose their three and four year olds to public schools, however not all are willing nor can equitably participate in the expansion of public pre-k. More unintended consequences include less access and affordability for infant and toddler care, more child care providers closing businesses and more unlicensed/illegal child care which leads to poor outcomes for children.

Blueprint Pillar 1 has many important goals including a substantial increase in the supply of early childhood education teachers, funding for both public-school and community-based pre-k, and measurables including reducing or eliminating achievement gaps. The Accountability and Implementation Board created a report that offers recommendations related to Pillar 1 and recognizes some of the barriers for a true mixed delivery system for prekindergarten in Maryland—requiring that all providers, both public and private, meet certain standards to receive public funding.

MSCCA is concerned as the *Blueprint*, especially related to Pillar 1 is implemented and we are still recovering from a pandemic. Many businesses are all struggling with a critical workforce shortage. Public schools are adjusting qualifications and soliciting in any way they can to fill teacher shortages. Child care is also struggling. Maryland lost over 800 child care programs since 2020, about 10%, and although many jobs have recovered, child care has lagged behind. Maryland is second highest in the country for loss of child care jobs at an alarming 25.5%, according to the June 2022 jobs report. (<https://communitychangeaction.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/June-9-State-by-State-Analysis-of-Changes-in-the-Child-Care-Sector-Over-the-Pandemic.pdf>)

Recovery of jobs in the child care industry specifically has been slower than most other industries. According to Bureau of Labor and Statistics in October 2022 figures show that employment in the child care sector is still 8.5% lower than February 2020. This is a shortage of approximately 88,000 jobs. The slow recovery in child care sector is due to numerous factors including closures and other pandemic related issues as well as a workforce leaving for better compensating jobs. The persistent shortages in child care has a ripple impact across the economy. Child care is an economic and equity imperative and essential to everyone, even if you do not have children or your children are adults.

We applaud the goals for mixed delivery, and you say you need child care providers to reach the Blueprint Pillar 1 goals, however there were only 90 applicants for the prek grants and of the 90 less than 30 were awarded. This number doesn't come close to meeting the 70/30 minimum split (or the final recommendations of 50/50 split) to deliver prek. Barriers include teacher certification requirements, lack of an equitable alternative pathway to certification for community providers, lack of resources to successfully write for and administer very complex prek grants and funding flows. Another barrier to true mixed delivery system is the issue of funding. This pre-k grant is flat funded, with a per child rate across the state. No other early childhood program is flat funded. The cost of living, and the cost of operating a business, varies across the state. The total cost of quality childcare has not been considered based on these differentials. The amount currently offered might fully fund a program in Western Maryland, but will probably not break even for a program in the central part of the state, yet both programs receive the same dollar amount per slot.

Maryland should consider other states alternatives as they adjust and consider the importance of essential child care. This school year Boston UPK will launch a new **per classroom funding formula** to ensure high quality learning environments for students. The new funding formula and rate will provide financial and operational stability to child care providers, empower them to implement high quality programming and ensure teachers at community sites receive pay commensurate with staff in district run schools. Providing per classroom instead of per pupil funding will provide stability for child care providers who have been greatly impacted by COVID. Boston mixed delivery model ensures family choice and that there is no wrong door for families looking for high quality prek experience. [\\$20 Million Investment to Expand Boston's Universal Pre-K Program | Boston.gov](#)

The interesting data from MSDE is that we already meet numerous requirements for Pillar 1. Maryland EXCELS reports there are 1,283 levels 3,4, and 5 programs participating therefore plenty to meet the 70/30 recommended split. Additionally, according to MSDE's database 1,993 child care teachers have bachelor's degrees, 403 with masters degrees, 14 with doctorates and 66 with foreign degrees. We should easily be able to meet the mixed delivery goals and avoid waivers in Blueprint, which will become the norm, but cannot if we don't make equitable changes including; expanding and creating provisional alternative pathways, giving credit for prior learning, credit for experience in the field, stackable credentials, timelines to achieve certification or equivalencies/alternatives for pre-k teacher certification, alignment of the current credentialing system with college credit, recognition and respect of competencies and work experience, as well as sustainable funding formulas to be competitive.

Greater emphasis on **equitable, fully funded**, alternative pathways and supports that meet the needs of Early Childhood professionals currently working in the field is needed. This means considering multiple entry points: EC professionals may be starting with a H.S. diploma, an A.A. degree, or a Bachelor's or Master's degree. Each of these professionals needs a pathway to certification if we are to meet the demand for teachers.

Examples of Needed Pathways and Supports Include:

Apprenticeships, competency-based education models, stackable and portable course work and credits, course work that meets the needs of teachers whose primary language is not English, remedial course work for those who need it prior to enrolling in college-level courses, and coaching and support to ensure persistence in higher education. The ECE field needs bold and innovative approaches, like HB 888 to address the workforce crisis AND approaches that meet the needs of the Birth to age 5 workforce that is currently employed across the state. We recommend and appreciate includes legislative language that mandates the development of innovative approaches to certification in Maryland to ensure that the vision of a mixed delivery system is realized, and that further degradation of the childcare infrastructure is averted.

If more licensed child care businesses close due to the loss of four year old's and a portion of income eligible three year old's because we cannot compete with public schools in prek arena for teachers, how will this impact goals to increase supply of teachers and reduce achievement gaps when infants toddlers twos and some three year old's will have less access to high quality child care, be forced into unlicensed or informal care which is proven to have poor kindergarten readiness outcomes? We are already losing our teachers to Amazon, Target, Washington DC child care jobs which are paying 15k bonuses as well as parity with public prek teachers and no teacher certification requirements. More unintended consequences will include higher infant toddler tuition which parents can barely access and afford now. We lost our kindergarteners when preschool for all rolled out and we pivoted the best we could, however we cannot survive without 3- and 4-year-olds.

The public prek grant parameters specify that if a program is not 85% enrolled by December 31, funding will be diminished by the number of unfilled slots. This is a burdensome penalty placed on community providers. It is my understanding that funding for public schools is not reduced if their enrollment targets are not met, so why are community providers penalized for this? A program that applies for this grant in good faith and commits to hold childcare slots open for income eligible children will incur the same fixed operating costs regardless of whether they are fully enrolled or not. Just like public schools, a community program must continue to pay the full salary and benefits of the lead and assistant teachers, they still pay the full amount of rent and facility maintenance costs, they still pay the full amount of water, gas, and electric regardless of how many children are enrolled. The difference for the community provider is that once the program commits to enrolling a certain number of income eligible children, they must leave those slots open and cannot give them away to a full tuition paying family.

The grant also stipulates that MSDE will provide support with recruitment to help community-based programs fill those committed slots. However, the only support MSDE has provided has been to suggest talking with the LEA or putting fliers up in the community. For a program that has already taken these steps, and paid for advertising, and reached out to as many community partners as possible to spread the word about the prekindergarten slots available at their program, yet still is unable to find eligible children to enroll, they not only are NOT receiving support from MSDE, but the program is also penalized and has money taken away that they can't afford to lose.

Additionally, there are costs associated with this grant that are not accounted for regarding teacher certification. To begin with, finding certified teachers is a challenge everywhere. According to University of Maryland, College Park in the School of Education, adjunct faculty, Randi Albertsen, over the past 2 years, the capacity of incoming students in her class has been 25, yet she has not had more than 12 potential teachers enrolled. People just are not choosing to go into this field. The current system to participate in public prekindergarten expansion as a mixed delivery system as it exists places a much higher burden on the childcare community, with barriers to participation at every turn. If the state intends to implement the Blueprint to fidelity, then it needs to create a more equitable, accessible system for community-based providers. HB 888 takes necessary steps to address the critical workforce shortages, acknowledge and address equity issues in alternative prek pathways and focus on viable solutions to numerous problems that have very real unintended consequences for children, families, child care/early childhood education.

MSCCA recommends a favorable committee report on HB 888.