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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

SPONSOR STATEMENT

Senate Bill 350 – Early Childhood Development – Child Care Scholarship Program - Alterations

March 29, 2023

Madame Chairman and Members of the Ways and Means Committee:

As little as five years ago, Maryland's Child Care Scholarship Program (CCS) ranked at or very near the bottom of the 50 states in access and affordability. Federal law requires "equal access" to childcare for low-income families, and the Feds strongly urge states to set rates that give access to 75% of childcare programs. Maryland's rates at the time gave parents access to only 10% of childcare programs and the income cap for a family of four was \$35,000.

Now, five years later, thanks to actions by the Legislature, the Administration and the Maryland State Department of Education, the CCS rates have risen from the 10th to the 70th percentile and the income cap for a family of four has risen to \$90,000. These improvements have moved Maryland from one of the worst programs in the country to one of the best.

Raising rates and income caps, and lowering or removing copayments has resulted in:

- increasing parents' ability to find and pay for care;
- encouraging more childcare programs to accept scholarship children;
- helping providers in low-income communities - who are most reliant on the scholarship - sustain their programs and improve quality;
- getting more children in safe, quality child care;
- and, enabling more parents to return to the workforce.

Senate Bill 350 will require the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), to report to the General Assembly if they are going to make any negative changes to the Program. It is the legislature that made the fiscal and policy decisions to ensure the improvements to this Program so it is fitting that the legislature be informed before any actions are taken that will reduce these benefits that are so important to our state's families and children.

I respectfully request a favorable report on Senate Bill 350.