



ARCO IRIS

BILINGUAL CHILDREN'S CENTER

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Testimony Concerning Support SB500

Child Care and Professional Development Fund-Alterations.

Submitted to the Senate Committee on Education, Energy and Environment

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Our state has a diverse population which is reflected across many professional fields. One of these is childcare, which includes center-based facilities and family care centers. This bill will allow many providers the much desired access to higher education so that we can continue improving early childhood education in our state.

As an immigrant, I can share that my own path to achieve higher education was long and difficult. I needed to learn English both orally and written sufficiently so that I could be successful in college. Having higher education reinforces the importance of professionalism, including pride and passion of being early childhood educators.

I was fortunate enough to start in Seattle Community College where they understood the importance of empowering immigrants by providing an amazing English as a Second Language program for free. My journey to obtain a Bachelor's Degree took more than ten years while being a full-time employee as well as a mother to two daughters.

The Child Care Career Professional Development Fund (CCCPDF) was created to help people within the childcare community to achieve higher education. Being able to expand the grant for people to attend a college or university that offers native language or bilingual coursework in early childhood education is an imperative and inclusive milestone that our state can achieve by passing Bill HB600.

The Accountability and Implementation Board blueprint for Maryland's future in their December 2023 report tells us about how our state can improve the pathways around five elements. Two of those elements established a target to support accessibility to alternative certification pathways and support for early childhood educators who speak a language other than English.

I am here to request your approval for this bill which will allow open opportunities for those like me working in the field. Childcare educators want to take advantage of this fund and acquire higher education, but English is not their first language. This is an amazing field full of diverse teachers who mirror the children we serve. In my higher education journey, it took me more than ten years to obtain a Bachelor's degree, but this long lead time can be drastically reduced by opening the CCCPDF for colleges and universities that provide bilingual or native language degrees.

Being a fellow for the Maryland Early Childhood Education Leadership Program (MECLP) and an advocate for this field, I have worked on how we can empower early educators in childcare to obtain higher education and professional development. Working on the capstone for my project, I found that Clackamas Community College (CCC) in Portland Oregon created an Associate's Degree in Spanish after receiving a significant increase in requests for courses in Spanish. We have a model to follow and a college which is willing to educate our diverse childcare teachers. Witnessing the accomplishments by Clackama Community College, I believe that Maryland can do it, too. This pathway of support would be tremendous for our teachers who have been in the field for years (sometimes decades).

In addition, this bill is looking to increase childcare service requirements from ten to 20 hours; this is necessary to maintain the early childhood education field alive and strong.

We need to retain people in the field so that we can improve the education of our children, from their birth to five years of age.

There is so much that needs to be done so that we can continue improving the early childhood education in our state. Thankfully, we are walking toward that, and right now, by passing House Bill 600, we will allow the beginning of a diverse, inclusive, and equitable pathway for childcare professionals. Moreover, we can achieve the goal of a mixed delivery system, one in which all childcare teachers are included – even those for whom English is not their first language.