

March 18, 2024

**Testimony in Support of HB 600/SB 500
Education - Child Care Career and Professional Development Fund - Alterations
Submitted to the House Ways and Means Committee**

Patti Smith

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Thank you for supporting **HB 600/SB 500 Education - Child Care Career and Professional Development Fund – Alterations**. Passage of this legislation will open much-needed opportunities for early childhood educators and the families counting on us. This bill calls for:

- updating the qualifications for an award from the Child Care Career and Professional Development Fund to include a service obligation to work in an approved child care setting for at least 20 hours per week;
- requiring the Office of Child Care at MSDE to prioritize grant awards to applicants who have not completed any college courses for credit;
- allowing an applicant to have attended or be accepted to an accredited college or university outside of Maryland and here is why that is especially important: there are schools from coast to coast *but not in Maryland* that offer native language or bilingual coursework in early childhood education or a related field. Ensuring Maryland's educators can access education in their most confident language is a big step forward for equity, language justice, ensuring meaningful experiences for early childhood educators and families.

As an early childhood educator for over 40 years I have never seen the staffing crisis this bad. It is essential that we are able to hire and retain qualified staff to operate our classrooms. Supporting the above mentioned bills will allow us to do just that. Child care is essential to Maryland's economy allowing parents the option of working while their children are cared for in safe, loving and learning environments. The Education work force is at a critical low, changes must be made to train, hire and retain qualified staff.

Children experience healthy child development that is crucial for success in school and in life, in family child care, centers, and school-based early childhood programs. Knowing this, the Kirwan Commission and the "Blueprint" legislation stood strong on a mixed delivery approach to delivering preK. That means having preK available in schools AND in child care centers and family child care.

Implementation has been challenging for school districts for a variety of reasons. To ensure mixed delivery and meaningful teacher preparation, we must value the strengths and competencies of the existing workforce. We must look at the path to certification, and this legislation is another part of that. We must strengthen the laws and the real options so that parents can choose what's best for their family, and the whole community benefits from partnering with early childhood educators in child care programs.

Thanks to the leadership of the General Assembly, we will achieve goals of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future, and the goals of families and educators right in our neighborhoods.

Thank you for hearing our voice in laws that affect our work.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Patti Smith', written over a horizontal line.

Patti Smith-Director

Greenway Learning Center for Infants and Children