

Greetings Chairwoman Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins, and all members of the Ways and Means Committee. My name is Crystal Barksdale, and I am the owner of Ms. Crystal's Little Rugrats Early Learning Program. I am a Large Family childcare provider in Baltimore County and a leader for the Early Learning Division with SEIU Local 500. I am writing in support of HB1403. This bill would change the age of an infant for Family Childcare and Large Family Childcare programs from 2 years and under to 18 months and under. This bill would support the lack of infant and toddler slots, without compromising the safety of children. This bill will give private providers the option to serve more families looking for infant and toddler care. The Blueprint calls for private and public providers to support our youngest learners. This bill will allow more infants and toddlers to be placed in quality childcare programs that support their growth and development and early learning education.

The past three years have made it clear how important quality childcare is to our society and economy. Parents are still juggling childcare, work, parenting, and self-care. HB1403 will address some of the barriers to high-quality childcare. As a childcare provider for over twenty-five years, I have seen dozens of families move from childcare to childcare when a family has a second child because the family childcare provider cannot accommodate the family because we are not allowed to care for more than two children under the age of 2 years old due to Maryland Family Childcare regulations. Many people may say a provider cannot safely move more than 2 infants and toddlers of daycare if an emergency arises. Once again, I believe it is up to a childcare provider to determine their individual capabilities while accessing their childcare environments and following COMAR.

As an employer and large family childcare provider in Baltimore County, my childcare program has several emergency evacuations and fire drills throughout the year. I've also seen firsthand many providers teach and care for children with disabilities, and they have safely managed their childcare environments. Childcare providers have adapted, to be sure, their homes are safe, and for far too long we have been carrying the burden of not being able to offer more care when needed for infants and toddlers. The supply of care relative to demand is very difficult to estimate in Maryland, however, we know that infant and toddler care is always in high demand. This bill is vital to supporting the current demand for infants and toddlers. Care comes in many forms, from center-based and licensed family and large family childcare, which is vital to our economy and workforce. Again, I urge you to vote favorably for HB1403.

Mrs. Crystal Barksdale

Owner/Director

Ms. Crystal's Little **Rugrats** LLC

Early Learning Program