



Testimony Concerning HB 1139
“Growing Family Child Care Opportunities Pilot Program – Permanent Establishment”
Submitted to the House Ways & Means and Appropriations Committees
February 21, 2024

Position: Support

Maryland Family Network (MFN) strongly supports HB 1139, which would on a permanent basis establish the Growing Family Child Care Opportunities Program to increase and sustain the supply of family child care.

MFN has worked since 1945 to improve the availability and quality of child care and early childhood education, as well as other supports for children and families in Maryland. We have been active in state and federal debates on child care policy and are strongly committed to ensuring that children, along with their parents, have access to high-quality, affordable programs and educational opportunities.

Registered family child care is a critical component of Maryland's child care delivery system. Family child care providers offer child care that most closely resembles the care that children receive in their own homes. Family child care providers care for many children who have special needs or need care during nontraditional hours. In rural areas, where population density may not support larger child care centers, family child care providers play a particularly important role. They also provide linguistically and culturally appropriate care within many communities in the State.

Unfortunately, the number of registered family child care providers in Maryland has been declining precipitously for more than two decades, from a high of more than 12,000 in 1996 to just over 4,300 in 2023. The declining number of family child care homes brings a tremendous degree of unmet need.

Legislation passed by this Committee in 2021 created a low-cost, time-limited pilot program (known as GOFCC) to increase the supply of family child care programs and ensure the sustainability of new and existing ones, particularly within underserved communities. That pilot program has achieved and documented remarkable outcomes, ultimately helping expand the supply of quality child care while supporting the efforts of low-income women—many in communities of color—to establish successful small businesses.

Here are some top-line results: Following an initial planning and grant award process, GOFCC began operating in September 2022. Since then, 320 participants have been engaged in five regions around the state. The duration of time between the beginning of the

application process to licensing has been shaved, on average, from between 12 - 18 months to approximately 5 months—encouraging more prospective providers to see the process through and creating new child care slots at a faster pace.

Of the 320 participants, 101 have achieved final licensing, adding 796 child care slots. An additional 81 participants are in the late stages of gaining final licensing approval, representing another 648 prospective child care slots. The remaining participants are still progressing through the process, with the potential to add more than 1,104 new slots.

These figures, impressive as they are, address only the start-up/licensure component of GOFCC. The program has also worked extensively and successfully to ensure that the new child care enterprises are well-versed in business sustainability practices and engaged in the State's child care quality enhancement initiatives. For more information about GOFCC's results, please contact MFN Public Policy Director Beth Morrow at bmorrow@marylandfamilynetwork.org

HB 1139 will make our commitment to this program permanent and ensure that our State builds on its remarkable success. MFN urges your favorable consideration.