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Legislative District 14
Montgomery County

Ways and Means Committee

Subcommittees

Early Childhood

Local Revenues



The Maryland House of Delegates
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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony in Support of House Bill 377: Therapeutic Child Care Grant Program - Funding - Alterations
January 31, 2024

Chairs Atterbeary and Barnes, Vice Chairs Wilkins and Chang, and esteemed members of the Ways and Means and Appropriations Committees, it is my pleasure to come before you and offer testimony in favor of **House Bill 377: Therapeutic Child Care Grant Program - Funding - Alterations**.

Over the last interim session, in my quest for solutions for the youth mental health crisis, I had the opportunity to see firsthand the impactful work of the Lourie Center for Children's Social and Emotional Wellness, a therapeutic child care program in Montgomery County. The Lourie Center is one of several programs benefiting from the Therapeutic Child Care Grant Program, currently allocated at \$3.7 million dollars. House Bill 377 is seeking to remove the sunset provision on the allocation of funds.

Therapeutic Child Care Programs are licensed integrated mental health and education programs for families with high-risk children birth to five. These children show significant delays in social and emotional development. Many have experienced trauma in their life, and many have been removed from typical mainstream preschool/daycares due to safety concerns or behavioral issues. Therapeutic Child Care Programs partner with parents/caregivers to effectively support the development of the child and the family as a whole. Therapeutic Child Care Programs can also offer specialized child care; for example, services for children who are experiencing homelessness or housing uncertainty.

There are several Therapeutic Child Care providers:

- The Arc of Maryland in Columbia, Howard County
- The Kennedy Krieger Institute in the City of Baltimore
- Kennedy Krieger PACT - Helping Children with Special Needs in Windsor Mill, Baltimore County
- The Lourie Center for Children's Social and Emotional Wellness in Rockville, Montgomery County

The \$3.7 million already allocated is worth the investment. Therapeutic Child Care Programs are proven effective, with an over 80% success rate of transitioning children to a mainstream kindergarten and maintaining typical education placement and social emotional gains through 2nd grade. The leaders, teachers, and staff, particularly the ones at the Lourie Center, are dedicated, caring, and attentive to the needs of the students. By investing in these Therapeutic Child Care Programs now, we save money in the long run by avoiding costly corrective actions on our youth, while reducing the need for family services and long-term intensive special education.

Even as we face a deficit, this is the kind of investment that is truly a cost-saving measure for our families and communities and no longer warrants a sunset provision, and I respectfully urge a favorable report on **House Bill 377**.

Bernice Mireku-North