

February 14, 2024

The Honorable Vanessa Atterbeary
Chair, House Ways and Means Committee
6 Bladen Street, Room 131
House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: HB662 – Large Family Child Care Homes and Child Care Centers - Child Care Teachers - Minimum Age – Support

Dear Chairwoman Atterbeary:

KinderCare Learning Companies, operating 35 centers and 16 before/ after school sites serving over 4,700 children across Maryland, strongly support HB662, altering the age requirement for an eligible individual to teach in an early learning center from 19 years old to 18 years old. The legislation, introduced by Delegate Guyton, will support early childhood education (ECE) by allowing providers to recruit interested candidates entering the workforce upon graduating from high school.

KinderCare applauds the state's efforts to expand access and affordability to ECE programs through increased investments in preschool and the child care scholarship program. However, expanded access to ECE hinges on the industry's ability to attract and retain qualified ECE professionals. Reports reveal at least 100,000 fewer ECE professionals across the United States than before the pandemic.¹ This must begin attracting new candidates into the ECE field.

As such, it is essential to consider teacher eligibility to recruit new candidates into the ECE field and offer training and credentialing as they explore the ECE profession. Lowering the minimum age requirement of eligible teachers from 19 to 18 years old would allow for the recruitment of high school graduates in this transitional time of their lives when many are already searching for jobs. By expanding the eligibility of the ECE workforce, the state is investing in its economy and addressing ways to eliminate labor shortages that affect all sectors.

Failing to make this critical policy change continues to put the ECE industry at a disadvantage with other sectors that can put 18 year olds at this crucial junction in their professional and educational careers. Instead, HB662 would further support and identify avenues to expedite the state's goals and commitment to helping working families, increasing accessibility for our youngest learners, and supporting the childcare workforce.

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/13/us/child-care-worker-shortage.html?smid=tw-share>



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For these reasons, KinderCare strongly supports HB662, and we respectfully request your vote to support this legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'R Shewbridge'.

Rylie Shewbridge
Government Relations Representative
KinderCare Learning Companies