



January 31, 2024

To: The House Ways and Means Committee
From: The Lourie Center for Children's Social and Emotional Wellness
Re: HB377 – Therapeutic Child Care Grant Program

POSITION: SUPPORT

Good afternoon, Madam Chair and Committee Members, and thank you for the opportunity to come before you in strong support of this important Therapeutic Childcare legislation. Special thanks to Delegate Bernice Mireku-North and Senator King for their leadership and championing of some of our most vulnerable and youngest children.

I am Dr. Jimmy Venza, a clinical psychologist, and Executive Director of the Lourie Center for Children's Social and Emotional Wellness in Rockville. The Lourie Center is one of our nation's homes of infant and early childhood mental health care. We are part of Maryland's fabric of specialized early childhood care, along with two other nationally recognized institutions: Kennedy Krieger and the Arc.

These programs provide highly specialized early childhood care for some of our most vulnerable infants, young children, and their families. The children all face great adversity, but the challenges look different: whether it be complex developmental disabilities, like autism, physical health and complex medical needs, or children experiencing trauma and mental health challenges – all leading to safety concerns, disruptions in early learning, and require intensive families supports and specialized, multidisciplinary teams of educators, health, and mental health experts.

Therapeutic childcare programs also train the early childhood workforce, conduct research, and spread best-practice around the state and throughout the country. At the same time, these services have faced chronic underfunding and are ever at risk for budget cuts and reductions in care. Funding through this bill over the past two years has been instrumental in ensuring access and continuity of care. This early intervention is essential to help the children and families reach their full potential throughout the lifespan.

Today, I urge you for a favorable report on HB0377– so that the 2024 legislative session will be remembered as the year when our State unites with our children and families to establish their specialized care, with sustained funding, in Maryland law.

Thank you and great gratitude to one and all for your service on behalf of our children, families, and community.

