



Testimony of Julia D'Angelo
Program Manager of School Strategies
Children's National Hospital
Co-Lead for the Early Childhood Education Work Group
before
House Ways and Means Committee
IN SUPPORT OF
HB 377: Therapeutic Child Care Grant Program – Funding – Alterations

January 31, 2024

Chairwoman Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in favor of House Bill 377. My name is Julia D'Angelo, and I am a Program Manager of School Strategies and a co-lead for the Early Childhood Education (ECE) workgroup at Children's National Hospital. Children's National has been serving the nation's children since 1870. Nearly 60% of our patients are residents of Maryland, and we maintain a network of community-based pediatric practices, surgery centers and regional outpatient centers in Maryland.

Formed in 2023, our ECE workgroup is advocating for high quality, affordable early childhood centers and stronger connections between early childhood centers and hospitals as part of our 2022-2025 Community Health Improvement Plan. Federal law requires nonprofit hospitals to assess community health needs and develop a response to those needs. The Children's National 2022 Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) utilized systematic, comprehensive data collection to help us understand and address the needs of the community we serve. Our analysis identified 12 key neighborhoods with the lowest Childhood Opportunity Index (COI) scores, including eight in Prince George's County, Maryland, that have been the focus for our ECE advocacy and programmatic initiatives.¹

Children's National and the ECE workgroup strongly support HB 377, with the stated intent of providing increased funding for providers that specialize in delivering high-quality childcare and education to children under 6 years of age with developmental and behavioral delays or difficulties.

¹ Children's National and HSC Health Care System's Community Health Needs Assessment and Community Health Improvement Plan can be found here: <https://www.childrensnational.org/in-the-community/child-health-advocacy-institute/community-affairs/improving-community-health>



According to a recent report from the Maryland Family Network, the percentage of children needing social/emotional accommodations lies between 36% to 54.9%.² While the American Academy of Pediatrics strongly recommends integration of young children with disabilities into ECE programs as a way of promoting healthy development and promoting school readiness, many of our own patients and families find a lack of availability in ECE programs that can serve their special health and developmental needs.³⁴ Children's National feels that the funding increases proposed in HB 377 will help close gaps in our ECE workforce shortage, and ensure more ECE centers have the capacity and skills to provide high-quality services to children across the developmental and behavioral spectrum.

Children's National and the ECE workgroup also acknowledge the benefits of this legislation on all children throughout Maryland. Children without disabilities or special health care needs also benefit from inclusive experiences. The funding allocation in this bill has the potential to increase positive academic, developmental, social, and attitudinal outcomes for *all* children from its encouragement of inclusive experiences.⁵

As mentioned, systemic workforce issues and high employee turnover contribute to a lack of stable ECE options for children with special needs across Prince George's County and Maryland as a whole. Specifically, almost 1/3 of the childcare workforce left their positions in 2021.⁶ Children's National and the ECE Work Group feel strongly that adding funds to the Therapeutic Child Care Grant Program will increase the quantity and quality of ECE programs and providers that service children with diverse needs. We applaud the efforts of the Maryland General Assembly for prioritizing early childhood

² Maryland Child Care Resource Network. (2022). Trends in Child Care - 2022. In *Maryland Family Network*. <https://www.marylandfamilynetwork.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/Trends%20in%20Child%20Care%202022.pdf>

³ COUNCIL ON EARLY CHILDHOOD, COUNCIL ON SCHOOL HEALTH; The Pediatrician's Role in Optimizing School Readiness. *Pediatrics* September 2016; 138 (3): e20162293. 10.1542/peds.2016-2293

⁴ Sarah E. McLellan, Marie Y. Mann, Joan A. Scott, Treeby W. Brown; *A Blueprint for Change: Guiding Principles for a System of Services for Children and Youth With Special Health Care Needs and Their Families*. *Pediatrics* June 2022; 149 (Supplement 7): e2021056150C. 10.1542/peds.2021-056150C

⁵ US Department of Education & US Department of Health & Human Services. (2023). POLICY STATEMENT ON INCLUSION OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS. In *EDBlogs*. <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/files/policy-statement-on-inclusion-11-28-2023.pdf>

⁶ *Id.* See footnote 2.



education, which will benefit our state's youngest residents and their families, and request a favorable report on House Bill 377.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. I am happy to respond to any questions you may have.