

Testimony in Support of HB 662 “Child Care Teachers—Minimum Age”
Submitted to the House Ways and Means Committee

I am reaching out to your committee today to express my support of HB 662. I am a small business owner in Maryland. My business, Forest Hill Nature Preschool, employs 65 workers in both part-time and full-time positions. We operate 15 classrooms in my childcare program. One of the biggest challenges facing my program and thousands of other childcare programs across the state is staffing. To try to grow the childcare workforce, my school partners with Harford County Public Schools and Harford Community College to employ students from local high schools and our local community college in apprenticeships. These employees work part time or full time while also taking classes to certify them as lead teachers in childcare under Maryland state licensing through MSDE. Many of the Maryland public school districts also offer programs within the high school curriculum for students to earn a 90-hour certification by taking college level coursework in child development and early childhood curriculum in their junior and senior years of high school. Unfortunately, under current COMAR guidelines, these staff members cannot qualify as lead teachers until they are 19 years old. In Maryland we use the Excels program to rate childcare educators by a quality rating scale. MD Excels qualifies these individuals according to their training and work experience. I have staff members who achieve the same Maryland Excels levels of quality as their lead teacher counterparts by age 18, but they are unable to be lead teachers until 19 because of current COMAR guidelines.

Under HB 662, the minimum age for childcare teachers would be changed from 19 to 18 years old. This would help address some of the staffing issues we are facing in our industry as we would be able to qualify staff members who have completed all of the necessary training when they finish high school. For my program, and many others across the state, we offer excellent after-school jobs for high school students interested in working with young children. I have staff members who begin employment at age 16 working as an Aide under a lead teacher in the classroom. When these high school students graduate, they can be hired in many other industries as full-time staff with full responsibilities and commensurate pay. They can even enter military service. In childcare, these high school students need to work an additional year as an Aide, even if they have completed all of their training and other qualifications, before they can be lead teachers. As Aides, these staff members are not even allowed to take children to the bathroom by themselves. Each preschool classroom in my program needs to be staffed with a lead teacher during all hours of operation, which for us is 7 AM- 6 PM. Staffing at this time is a huge challenge for childcare programs. When we post new lead teacher positions, it takes an average of 6 months for us to find a qualified candidate who completes the entire onboarding process—applying for the position, showing up for an interview, completing the background checks, waiting to be approved by Licensing, and showing up to start working. In the current school year, I have spent months working in a classroom myself trying to balance administrative responsibilities as the program Director and business owner due to being short-staffed. Although I would prefer to testify in person for this bill hearing, I am in a classroom full time without coverage to leave even for this important advocacy effort. At the current time, there is a significant staffing shortage across the industry which has resulted in some programs in Maryland having to close classrooms due to not having enough qualified teachers. As the workforce behind the workforce, we cannot afford to lose childcare spaces in Maryland. The Maryland State Legislature and MSDE need to work together to pass legislation like HB 662 to help childcare build back staffing to be able to provide the care that the parents and families in Maryland desperately need.

I thank you in advance for your support of HB 662. The childcare programs in Maryland will thank you.

Lavonne Taylor, Owner/Director Forest Hill Nature Preschool & Childcare in Harford County Maryland