

Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 359: Therapeutic Child Care Grant Program

January 27, 2025

Dear Chairperson and members of the Committee,

My name is Ciara Barkley-Cutting, and I am a Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) at The Arc Prince George's County. For over a decade, I have dedicated my career to serving individuals with neurodevelopmental differences and behavioral challenges. I am here today to express my strong support for Senate Bill 359. The early childhood education field is facing unprecedented challenges. Recent studies indicate that childcare centers experience turnover rates exceeding 40%, with many educators citing lack of support for children with complex behavioral needs as a primary reason for leaving. Meanwhile, the prevalence of developmental disabilities among children has increased significantly, with approximately one in six children aged 3-17 years having one or more developmental disabilities. This growing need, combined with workforce challenges, creates a critical gap in services that this bill helps address.

Let me share a story that illustrates the transformative impact of therapeutic childcare support. We worked with a three-year-old boy with significant support needs, namely in communication and challenging behaviors, which occurred more than 50 times per day. Through our program's collaborative approach – involving parents, teachers, and providers like myself – and implementing hands-on modeling, we achieved remarkable results. His challenging behaviors decreased by 95%, and more importantly, he developed crucial social and communication skills. He successfully transitioned between classrooms, maintained his progress across different settings, and developed the foundational skills needed for school readiness, including sharing with peers and engaging in cooperative learning.

Children with challenging behaviors don't have to be isolated or left behind. I am testifying today because I have witnessed firsthand how proper support and funding for therapeutic childcare programs can prevent early childhood exclusion and promote genuine inclusion. Without such support, many children with high support needs face removal from early childhood settings, losing critical opportunities for development alongside their peers. The Therapeutic Child Care Grant Program provides essential resources that enable centers to maintain inclusive environments while supporting both children and staff effectively. This investment not only supports immediate needs but builds a foundation for long-term success in inclusive educational settings.

Thank you for your consideration of my testimony. I ask you to move this bill forward with a favorable report.

Respectfully submitted,

Ciara Barkley-Cutting, M.Ed., BCBA, LBA  
The Arc Prince George's County

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Ciara Barkley-Cutting', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.