



March 3, 2025

## Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 857 – Child Care - Prekindergarten Expansion Grant Modifications and Workgroup

**We respectfully urge the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee to make a favorable report on SB 857– Child Care - Prekindergarten Expansion Grant Modifications and Workgroup - as we believe it will make the implementation of the mixed delivery Pre-K system, as envisioned in the Blueprint for Maryland’s future, more equitable and ultimately more successful.**

As the largest county in Maryland, Montgomery County has a long way to go in order to meet goals for expanding the Pre-K system. A report commissioned by the county estimated that over 6,500 community-based Pre-K seats will be needed to serve 50% of the eligible Tier 1 three- and four-year-olds and all Tier 2 four-year-olds.<sup>i</sup> We currently have 354 seats.

This is a substantial increase from 208 seats in SY24 – due in large part to technical assistance and grant application support we provided through contracted partners to 8 new participating centers. We are now continuing to support these providers in managing the reporting requirements for the Pre-K grant, as it’s a substantial burden for these small businesses. As we support these providers with their participation, it is woefully clear that many of the structures and policies of the grant itself inhibit the success of the program for community-based providers.

Additionally, Montgomery County recently completed a Child Care supply and demand study in order to understand how to better improve access to child care so that parents can participate in the labor force.<sup>ii</sup> Among other important findings, the study found that our county faces a substantial shortage of child care supply for children under the age of 2 with only enough licensed seats to serve 19% of children this age in our County. The report also found that though there are enough preschool seats to serve 83% of preschool aged children, many seats remain vacant because families cannot afford to access them. Families are in need of state supported Pre-K for their 3- and 4-year-old children. Community-based providers need state supported Pre-K to enroll these families and keep their businesses afloat. However, as we expand Pre-K, we need to learn from other jurisdictions who have gone before us, such as Washington D.C.<sup>iii</sup>, and ensure that Pre-K expansion does not further jeopardize child care access for families with infants and toddlers.

Senate Bill 857 will offer substantial improvements to make participation in Pre-K more equitable for community-based providers, by:

- Changing the timing of the Pre-K expansion grant process so that the notice of grant awards is distributed by March 1st in order to align with the enrollment process for providers and allow partnered outreach with local education agencies.
- Stabilize the funding so that small business child care providers can ensure these seats are available for families who need the care the most by moving the grant from a





reimbursement model to an upfront payment grant model and establishing a multi-year grant award process.

- Improving the application process and providing technical assistance.
- Convening a work group to explore opportunities to incentivize Pre-K expansion while stabilizing infant and toddler seats.

The model as it exists today for private community-based providers to apply to the Maryland State Department of Education to receive Pre-K grants does not currently work for the majority of private providers in our community. We need to make investments in infrastructure to support community-based providers participation in Pre-K if we truly want to have enough Pre-K seats to meet the needs of young children and their families in our community.

Submitted on behalf of the Children's Opportunity Alliance by

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Laura Jahromi".

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The Montgomery County [Children's Opportunity Alliance](#) is a locally legislated Early Care and Education Coordinating Entity that connects our community to build an equitable, accessible, high-quality, and sustainable early childhood system that narrows disparities and puts young children on a path to reach their greatest potential.

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<sup>i</sup> [https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/Resources/Files/FY22%20Blueprint%20Report%20FINAL%20Report%20October%202022\(2\).pdf](https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/Resources/Files/FY22%20Blueprint%20Report%20FINAL%20Report%20October%202022(2).pdf)

<sup>ii</sup> [https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/Resources/Files/StateSupplyDemand\\_final\\_January2025.pdf](https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/Resources/Files/StateSupplyDemand_final_January2025.pdf)

<sup>iii</sup> <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/effects-universal-preschool-washington-d-c/>