



THE SENATE OF MARYLAND  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**SPONSOR TESTIMONY**  
**Senate Bill 868**  
**Substitute Child Care Provider Pool Pilot Program**

Chairman Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Committee Members

Thank you for the opportunity to introduce Senate Bill SB868 -Substitute Child Care Provider Pool Pilot Program

For the record, I am Senator Shaneka Henson from the 30th Legislative District of Anne Arundel County, MD

Establishing the Substitute Child Care Provider Pool Pilot Program is about ensuring that childcare facilities can stay open and fully staffed, even when unexpected absences happen. Right now, childcare providers—whether they are in centers, family childcare homes, or large family childcare homes—struggle with staffing shortages. When someone calls out sick or has an emergency, there often is not an available, qualified substitute to step in, which can lead to temporary closures or reduced services.

This bill creates a pool of pre-vetted, trained substitute childcare providers who are ready to fill those short-term gaps. It is a simple, common-sense way to support working parents, keep childcare businesses running smoothly, and make sure kids have the consistent care they deserve. I introduced this because I have heard directly from providers, families, and advocates that this is a huge issue, and I believe we can fix it.

The pilot program is for all licensed childcare facilities—that includes family childcare homes, large family childcare homes, and traditional childcare centers. Family childcare providers are a critical part of our childcare system, and they often do not have the same staffing flexibility as larger centers. That is why I made sure

they are included—so they, too, can have access to trained substitutes when they need them.

We recognize that we are in a tight budget year, and every dollar we invest must be justified. That is exactly why this bill makes sense. A \$375,000 annual investment is a small price to pay compared to the economic impact of childcare closures on working families and businesses. But when parents do not have childcare, they cannot go to work—that affects productivity, businesses, and even tax revenues.

This program is not just an expense; it is a strategic investment in keeping our childcare system stable and dependable. We are also starting with a pilot so we can evaluate the model before making a larger commitment. That kind of fiscal responsibility should give lawmakers confidence in supporting it.

We are going to establish a process to determine if this is a viable statewide program by asking whether:

- Is this working for childcare providers?
- Are substitutes being used effectively?
- Are we reducing disruptions in care?

We will be looking at how often substitutes are deployed, how many providers participate, and whether facilities report fewer staffing-related closures.

We are also going to listen directly to childcare providers, families, and the substitutes themselves—do they feel supported? Is the process easy to navigate? Does this help stabilize their operations? That real-world feedback will tell us if this is a scalable solution or if we need to adjust before expanding statewide.

This program is intended to accomplish three essential goals.

1. Increase childcare stability—reduce closures and disruptions due to staffing shortages.
2. Build a pipeline of qualified providers—give more people a pathway into early childhood education by helping them meet training and credentialing requirements.
3. Make it easy and effective—ensure that childcare facilities and providers use and benefit from the program.

We will set measurable targets—like how many substitutes we recruit, how many facilities participate, and how often substitutes are placed—to make sure we are delivering real impact. If we hit those goals, this could become a model for permanent statewide implementation.

By establishing the Substitute Child Care Provider Pool Pilot Program in the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), we can facilitate the continuous operation of childcare facilities in the State by ensuring that qualified substitute childcare providers are available to fill short-term staffing needs of childcare facilities on a temporary basis.

We are targeting the pilot program to begin July 1, 2026, and end June 30, 2030. To accomplish this, the MSDE must (1) select a nonprofit organization to administer the program that meets specified requirements and (2) annually develop and publish goals for the program. For fiscal 2027 through 2030, the Governor must include an appropriation of \$375,000 in the annual budget bill for the program. By December 1, 2029, MSDE must report to the General Assembly on the status of the program, including (1) an evaluation of the program and (2) whether the program has met the goals set by MSDE.

After you hear the advocates testimony, I urge you to give a favorable report to this important bill.