



**HB1475 Office of Child Care Advisory Council - Publicly Funded Prekindergarten –
Analysis and Report (Mixed Delivery Model Viability Act)
Senate Education, Energy & the Environment Committee
April 2, 2025
Position: Favorable**

The Maryland Down Syndrome Advocacy Coalition (MDAC) is a coalition of the five Down syndrome organizations in Maryland as well as individuals with Down syndrome and their family members who have come together to advocate for improved quality of life for all individuals with Down syndrome throughout the state of Maryland.

MDAC strongly supports HB1475, requiring the Office of Child Care Advisory Council to conduct an analysis of a mixed delivery model for publicly funded prekindergarten in Maryland as envisioned by the Blueprint for Maryland’s Future. As the complex challenges associated with realizing this vision have become more apparent, a thorough analysis conducted by a group of experts and stakeholders like the Council is essential. The bill as amended ensures that the analysis explicitly includes some of the challenges identified by the Blueprint Special Education Workgroup, for which MDAC co-chair Liz Zogby serves as co-chair.¹

A mixed delivery system is a tremendous opportunity for improving outcomes for children with disabilities. This strategy was affirmed by 2023 joint policy guidance on inclusive early childhood programs from the US Departments of Education and Health & Human Services which notes:

“IDEA’s FAPE and LRE requirements should not be interpreted as prioritizing or allowing IDEA preschool special education and related services to be delivered only in preschool programs operated in a public-school building; child care, Head Start, other publicly-funded, and private early childhood settings can be used to provide FAPE.... A mixed delivery system of public and private high-quality early childhood programs is vital in increasing the availability of inclusive opportunities for children with disabilities.”²

Inclusion of young children with disabilities in early childhood programs is critical because of the known trajectory for students who begin in segregated settings. As Erik Carter of Baylor University

¹ The Workgroup (<https://blueprint.marylandpublicschools.org/special-education-workgroup/>) recommended that MSDE develop a plan “to meet the specific challenges of Pre-K expansion and a mixed delivery system that will meet the needs of students with disabilities, including recruiting and preparing private Pre-K providers, transportation, and facilities requirements.”

² U.S. Departments of Education and Health & Human Services, (Nov. 2023). *Policy Statement on Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Early Childhood Programs*, p.12.

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ecd/policy-statement-on-inclusion.pdf>, IDEA refers to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. FAPE refers to the “free and appropriate public education” to which students with disabilities are entitled. LRE refers to the “least restrictive environment,” the legal requirement that students with disabilities be educated to the maximum extent appropriate with their nondisabled peers.

has noted, “Early segregation does not merely predict later segregation; it almost ensures it.”³ To create a mixed delivery system that intentionally includes children with disabilities, we must examine the specific barriers and challenges to this implementation.

MDAC appreciates that the bill as amended includes specific items to address these issues:

“how best to use publicly funded prekindergarten to provide a quality early childhood education for students with and without disabilities together in the same classrooms, including by developing methods to best:

- (i) combine federal, State, and local funding sources available for children in a publicly funded prekindergarten context to maximize support for all children;*
- (ii) improve teacher and staff training and recruitment to address the needs of students with and without disabilities; and*
- (iii) foster collaboration between public and private prekindergarten providers in delivering specialized transportation and services for students with disabilities.”*

For these reasons, MDAC appreciates the introduction of this important bill and strongly supports its passage.

Respectfully submitted,

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³ Carter, E. W. (2015). What matters most: Toward a future of flourishing. TASH Connections, 41(3) 10-20.