

Hearing Testimony March 5, 2025
Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
Service Employees International Union, Local 500

SB857

Child Care – Prekindergarten Expansion Grant Modifications and Workgroup

SUPPORT

SEIU Local 500 represents over 20,000 working people in Maryland, Washington D.C., and Virginia. Our union represents the support staff at the Montgomery County Public School system, Family Child Care Providers, Faculty and Staff at several Maryland colleges and universities, staff at non-profits and many other working people across the region. We urge a FAVORABLE Report on SB857 –Child Care – Prekindergarten Expansion Grant Modifications and Workgroup.

SB857 proposes changes to the Prekindergarten Expansion Grants the use the funds in ways that will ensure a balanced and inclusive approach to early childhood education. The proposed changes to the grant process, including the addition of slots for more children without supplanting vital child care slots for infants and toddlers, and the inclusion of new instructions and terminology, are critical steps in strengthening our child care and early education systems.

First and foremost, it is crucial to recognize that child care for infants and toddlers is a foundational component of early childhood development. These years are a critical period for cognitive, social, and emotional growth, and the availability of safe, high-quality care during this time is indispensable for the well-being and future success of our children. The need for more infant and toddler slots cannot be overstated. As we focus on expanding access to prekindergarten programs, we must ensure that these changes do not inadvertently reduce the availability of care for younger children, who are at a stage of development that requires unique attention and support.

By ensuring that the Prekindergarten Expansion Grants are structured in a way that prioritizes the creation of additional prekindergarten slots without compromising infant and toddler care, we can create a more holistic approach to child care that addresses the needs of families with children at all ages. This balance will not only support children's development but will also provide parents with the stability and security they need to work, knowing that their children are receiving care that is tailored to their developmental stages.

The proposal for the State Department of Education to establish a multiyear grant award process is another essential step forward. This long-term approach will help providers plan effectively, ensuring

sustainability and continuity in care offerings. A multiyear process provides the stability necessary for providers to grow and enhance their programs without the uncertainty that comes with yearly grant applications. This will also allow the department to allocate resources more strategically, targeting areas of need and ensuring that services are distributed equitably across communities.

Furthermore, the recommendation to convene a workgroup to explore and recommend opportunities to incentivize the growth of child care providers, particularly those offering slots for infants and toddlers, is vital. By encouraging the expansion of care options for the youngest children, we can not only support families but also help ensure that the workforce in the child care industry is trained and equipped to meet the evolving needs of the children they care for. These incentives can help bring more providers into the field, increase the quality of care, and support the workforce in an industry that has long been underappreciated.

In conclusion, the proposed changes to the Prekindergarten Expansion Grants represent a thoughtful and balanced approach to addressing the critical needs of children, families, and child care providers. I strongly urge the committee to move forward with these changes, as they will ensure that both early education and infant and toddler care are prioritized in a way that supports the growth and success of all children in our state.

We respectfully request a favorable report on SB857