



January 24, 2025

To: The House Ways and Means Committee
From: The Lourie Center for Children's Social and Emotional Wellness
Re: HB185 Therapeutic Child Care Grant Program - Funding - Alterations

POSITION: SUPPORT

Good afternoon, Madam Chair and Committee Members, and thank you for the opportunity to write to you in strong support of this important Therapeutic Childcare legislation. Special thanks to Delegates Mireku-North, Chair Atterbeary, Foley, Kaufman, Miller, Solomon, Terras, and Vogel as well as Senator King for their leadership and championing some of our most vulnerable and youngest children.

I am Dr. Jimmy Venza, licensed psychologist, and Executive Director of the Lourie Center for Children's Social and Emotional Wellness in Rockville. The Lourie Center has been my work home for more than twenty years and the Center is one of our nation's homes for infant and early childhood mental health care. We are also part of Maryland's fabric of specialized early childhood care, along with two other nationally recognized institutions: Kennedy Krieger and the Arc.

These programs provide highly specialized early childhood care for some of our most vulnerable infants, young children birth to 5, and their families. The children all face great adversity: whether it be complex developmental disabilities, like autism, physical health/complex medical needs, or children experiencing trauma and mental health challenges – all leading to safety concerns, disruptions in early learning, and require intensive family supports and specialized care from multidisciplinary teams of educators, health, and mental health experts.

Therapeutic childcare programs also train the early childhood workforce, conduct research, and spread best-practice around the state and throughout the country. At the same time, these services have faced chronic underfunding and are ever at risk for budget cuts and reductions in care. Funding through this bill over the past three years has been instrumental in ensuring access and continuity of care for families in need. This early intervention service is essential to helping children and families reach their full potential throughout the lifespan and represents significant return on investment in reducing long-term financial and human costs related to school drop-out, substance abuse, and special education costs.

Today, I urge you for a favorable report on HB185– so that the 2025 legislative session will be remembered as the year when our State unites with our children and families to establish their specialized care, with sustained funding, in Maryland law.

Thank you and great gratitude to one and all for your service to our children, families, and community.

