

Hearing Testimony March 3, 2025
House Ways and Means Committee
Service Employees International Union, Local 500

HB1374

Prekindergarten - 3-Year-Olds - Private Providers (Parental Choice for Prekindergarten Act)

UNFAVORABLE

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 UNFAVORABLE Report on HB1374 – Prekindergarten - 3-Year-Olds - Private Providers (Parental Choice for Prekindergarten Act).

This bill would weaken the intended "mixed delivery system" for publicly funded Pre-Kindergarten by disproportionately favoring public schools and pushing private providers out of business. The mixed delivery model was adopted in the Blueprint for Maryland's Future as an acknowledgement that public schools alone would not be able to serve the number of children as the state moves toward universal public Pre-K. If this bill is left unchanged, it would result in fewer options for families, particularly in underserved areas, and ultimately harm the quality and accessibility of Pre-K services across the state. We believe that this bill introduces an unmanageable level of competition and inequity between public and private providers, and while we fully support expanding access to high-quality early childhood education, we are deeply concerned that the proposed changes in the bill would disadvantage private providers, who play a crucial role in meeting the diverse needs of Maryland families.

Child care providers are deeply committed to the well-being and education of our youngest learners, so we have serious concerns regarding the potential negative impact of this bill on our industry. The child care business model relies on both 3.AND.4 year olds. Restricting fully funded Tier I 4-year-old Pre-K students to public schools creates an imbalance and drastically undermines the sustainability of private providers. As a result of this bill, private providers will be forced out of the market due to financial instability. Many private child care centers are already struggling to maintain enrollment levels due to rising operational costs, staffing shortages, and other challenges. Without sufficient resources, many child care providers will be forced to scale back services or close entirely, impacting not just Pre-K enrollment, but families with children of all ages who rely on child care providers for affordable, high-quality child care. We must ensure that private providers have the financial

support needed to remain an integral part of Maryland's early childhood education landscape.

The age restrictions proposed by this bill reduce family choice and restrict parents' ability to select the best educational setting for their child's unique needs. Pre-K enrollment decisions should prioritize parent choice, ensuring that families can access quality education in both public and private settings. Private providers offer flexible, high-quality, and community-based care that meets the diverse needs of families. Strengthening collaboration with private providers will ensure that Maryland's Pre-K system is truly inclusive and capable of serving all families, regardless of their choice of provider. The state should engage private providers as equal partners in the implementation of the Pre-K system, rather than prioritizing public Pre-K expansion and Head Start programs.

We urge you to reconsider the approach put forth in this bill and ensure that both public and private child care providers are equitably supported in providing high-quality Prekindergarten education to all children, especially those who need it most.