



DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

Wes Moore, Governor · Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor · Rafael López, Secretary

March 3, 2025

The Honorable Vanessa E. Atterbeary, Chair
House Ways and Means Committee
130 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**RE: TESTIMONY ON HB 1121 - CHILD CARE SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM - YOUTH
TRANSITIONING FROM FOSTER PLACEMENT TO SUCCESSFUL ADULTHOOD PILOT
PROGRAM - ESTABLISHMENT - POSITION: FAVORABLE**

Dear Chair Atterbeary and Members of the Ways and Means Committee:

The Maryland Department of Human Services (DHS) thanks the Committee for its consideration and respectfully requests a favorable report for House Bill 1121 (HB 1121).

With offices in every one of Maryland's jurisdictions, DHS provides preventative and supportive services, economic assistance, and meaningful connections to employment development and career opportunities to assist Marylanders in reaching their full potential. Our Social Services Administration (SSA) implements the Older Youth program serving youth in our care who would greatly benefit from HB 1121. DHS is committed to a future in which all youth in our care receive the support they need to achieve self-sufficiency and transition successfully into adulthood.

HB 1121 would achieve two key goals of the Moore-Miller administration: reducing childhood poverty and providing comprehensive support for youth who have experienced foster care. HB 1121 would advance these goals for the youth in our care by reducing barriers to independence and providing additional support when they transition to living independently.

The absence of child care is a barrier to pursuing educational and employment opportunities for pregnant and parenting youth in foster care. Pregnant and parenting foster youth need affordable child care to look for and pursue employment and education opportunities. Through no fault of their own, youth in care are frequently separated from families who could otherwise provide temporary child care while a

young parent seeks work or educational opportunities. HB 1121 would remove the barrier to accessible child care for pregnant and parenting youth in out-of-home care as they transition to adulthood by authorizing earlier access to the [Child Care Scholarship Program](#) (CCSP). HB 1121 would enable youth in care and those transitioning out of care to apply for CCSP without requiring proof of employment, enrollment in education or career programs, and without the name of and written authorization from the other parent. Removing the child care barrier to employment and education could interrupt generational experiences in foster care. Research demonstrates that economic distress and income instability may increase likelihood of child maltreatment due to lack of resources and sudden change or volatility in a family's economic situation. Removing the child care barrier for youth in our care helps to stabilize the young family's economic foundation.

Research also demonstrates that the lack of access to child care increases the risk for child neglect. In fact, the lack of access to child care is a stronger predictor of child neglect than mental health. Pregnant and parenting youth are frequently unable to afford child care, which creates a significant barrier to independence. As of February 2025, the Economic Policy Institute ranked Maryland 11th out of all states and state equivalents for our cost of infant care, averaging nearly \$19,000 annually per child.¹ DHS has limited resources to assist youth in our care with the cost of child care when transitioning to adulthood. The Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) authorizes federal funds to support pregnant and parenting youth with preventative services, such as mental health resources and in-home skill-based programs. However, FFPSA funding alone does not completely cover the cost of child care in Maryland, and this is where access to the CCSP is critical. Prioritizing child care to support the parenting youth in our care is investing in child safety and well-being.

The existing requirements to qualify for CCSP work against the youth in our care from accessing the scholarship. Many pregnant or parenting youth would need reliable and safe child care to attend a job interview or commit to a work or school schedule. Child care must come first. With early access to reliable child care, HB 1121 would remove the fear of young parents that they would have to quit an opportunity simply because they are unable to arrange child care after saying "yes." Removing the burden of proving employment or enrollment in order to access CCSP enables young parents to job hunt, maintain employment, and pursue higher education or career training. Pregnant and parenting youth in our care should have priority access to the child care scholarship for their children, providing the essential support for child safety, and establishing self-sufficiency and a successful transition to adulthood. Lack of access to child care should not be a barrier for the youth in our care and their children.

¹ <https://www.epi.org/child-care-costs-in-the-united-states/#/MD>

We appreciate the opportunity to offer favorable testimony to the Committee for consideration during your deliberations. The Maryland State Department of Education administers the Child Care Scholarship and we appreciate their collaboration and partnership in serving our customers. If you require additional information, please contact Rachel Sledge, Director of Government Affairs, at rachel.sledge@maryland.gov.

In service,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Carnitra White". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "C".

Carnitra White
Principal Deputy Secretary