

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

The Arc Montgomery County is submitting this testimony in support of SB359 Therapeutic Child Care Grant Program - Funding - Alterations. As I am sure you are aware, this grant helps organizations like The Arc Montgomery County operate much needed early care and education programs for all children, both those with and without disabilities.

Unfortunately, due to an oversight in the Governor's budget, and amendments to HB0185, programs that depend on this critical assistance are in jeopardy due to a \$2.2 million reduction.

Because of the timely support from the Grant Program, The Arc Montgomery County has been able to operate the Karasik Family, Infant and Child Care Center (KFICCC) facility in Silver Spring, which includes both children with and without disabilities into the same classroom. Our method ensures that all students enrolled are actively included in the classroom, without the need of segregated classes. While our methods are new, the results speak for themselves. All of our students are developing at or above anticipated levels, we believe this is largely due to our inclusive classrooms, which always maintain the necessary staffing levels for education and medical staff. In a time when early childcare is in short supply, and inclusive classrooms are deemed too expensive to run, we have managed to operate a facility that not only delivers but does so in a way that is less expensive than other early care programs.

Due to our highly competitive pricing, and general lack of early childcare education in Montgomery County, we unfortunately have had to limit the number of seats available. Currently, we have 120 children enrolled in our program, most of which come from low-income families and some that utilize our childcare program for reduced cost via the Childcare Scholarship, Working Parent Voucher, PreK grant or Equicare Grant. Any seat that opens in our facility is promptly filled from our waitlist, which varies by age and need. For infants, children with disabilities and children with medical needs, the wait can be as long as two years.

"Eddie" is a perfect example of how children and their families benefit from KFICCC. As a three-year-old with diabetes, "Eddie" needs a nurse on-site in order to attend PreK. He also receives on-site support for speech and a few other developmental delays that were likely the result of this medical condition. He loves our PreK program, and is on track to be ready for kindergarten. His parent was able to return to work because Eddie had secure childcare. Eddie is one of 38 children at KFICCC that depend on this program.

Unfortunately, none of this is possible without funding from the state, including the Therapeutic Child Care Grant Program. Although we have a good business model, the funds from the state ensure that we are able to provide education and care for children regardless of a family's ability to pay or the child's ability. Timely and reliable funds from the State of Maryland are necessary for KFICCC to operate, and a reduction of more than half will have a lingering impact.

We ask for your help to restore 2.2 Million to the Therapeutic Child Care Grant Program (R00A02.57) to the FY26 budget AND conform the House Bill 185 to the same language/posture as Senate Bill 359, to ensure the appropriation of 3.7 million will be in place for the Therapeutic Child Care Grant Program from FY27-29.

There are dozens of children like Eddie that are relying on you to preserve this funding.

Sincerely,

The Arc Montgomery County