

Ways and Means
March 10, 2025
HB 1475
Position: Support

My name is Cindi Webb, and I own two childcare centers in Frederick County that have served thousands of children since 2007. I am a mother, grandmother and foster/adoptive parent.

I support HB1475. In order for Blueprint, Pillar 1 to be successful, we need many private childcare providers to participate. I am requesting help in creating equitable policies that support community-based mixed delivery PreK programs.

One specific example of an inequity that needs to be addressed is Maryland EXCELS ratings to ensure equity between public and private programs and to ensure we continue to expand and maintain seats for three- and four-year-olds. There are limited EXCELS 5 programs participating in public PreK, mine was one of them. My original goal was to advocate and be a model for more programs participating as I currently have 40 public PreK seats and had been a level 5 excels program for several years.

This upcoming grant cycle, I will not be able to participate as a PreK grant site due to an EXCELS policy and I want you to be aware of the loss of 40 seats in Frederick county. Additionally, four teachers will lose their PreK jobs.

Based on the current EXCELS policy -Due to two licensing violations, neither related to the blueprint PreK program - our EXCELS rating has been decreased from level 5 to a 1. Even though we are currently operating as a level 1 EXCELS rating, my blueprint PreK programs continue to receive excellent reviews from MSDE PreK grant monitors. We will remain an EXCELS level 1 for a full year when the violation falls off in July 2025, and magically we become a level 5 again. Despite being a level 5 again in July 2025, I will still not be able to participate as a PreK grantee in the fall as the timing of grant application will not allow me to apply because a level 3/4/5 is required to apply.

My experience has proven that public schools do not follow the same policies or receive the same disciplinary actions as MSDE requires for Blueprint public PreK in community-based settings. A personal example is when a Frederick County school bus driver dropped a PreK age child headed to our program, at the wrong bus stop, leaving them completely unsupervised, lost, and in actual danger, yet there is no punishment or accountability for the public school's mistake. There is no decrease in the public school's EXCELS ratings nor do they lose the opportunity to participate in next grant or have their classrooms closed for the upcoming school year. They do not lose their grant funding. Yet, as a community-based program we lose it all.

In my program when we had a safety issue, I immediately self-reported to MSDE, the parent, and social services. I immediately investigated and terminated the sole staff member involved who did not follow our safety protocol. As a result, my program lost 4

levels of excels that took over two years to achieve. My business has lost tens of thousands of dollars due to this policy which is not progressive, and **we will lose all of our PreK seats and funding, which is likely to put us out of business.** Had I not participated in Blueprint community-based PreK, I would not be in this predicament now as I would have had my private pay students enrolled. I 100% believe in accountability and policies that are fair and helpful. I am not alone as I have colleagues who have also shared similar experiences and lost PreK seats.

Below is how our program was treated for a second violation. Is this equitable?

- Our EXCELS level was moved from a level 5 (highest quality rating) to a level 1 (lowest quality rating).
 - **This means we are no longer able to apply for the PreK Expansion Grant or Blueprint grant as the minimum EXCELS level for application is level 3.**
 - **40 children currently in our PreK will no longer be able to attend as we lose our \$520,000 grant to provide high quality care to these students**
 - We lost our EXCELS bonus money for offering Child Care Scholarship at a level 5 which was approximately \$5,000 a month. We use this money for bonuses, staff training, raises, to pay for our teacher's hotel rooms and gas to attend the MSCCA conference, for upgrades and materials for our program, and to maintain a high-quality, accredited program.
 - Loss of \$13,500 bonus for maintaining Level 5
 - Two talented and skilled lead teachers will lose their jobs along with their two excellent assistants. These teachers were NOT involved in either non-compliance.
- We were put on a compliance agreement with licensing, Office of Child Care including:
 - Additional unannounced monitoring visits from our licensing specialist (all inspections have been good)
 - Creating a Corrective Action Plan and ensuring all staff members are aware of the plan upon hire
 - Creating a Health and Safety Daily Check List
 - Including in our monthly staff meeting, topics including Abuse and Neglect reporting, active supervision, playground supervision, center policies and procedures and provide evidence to OCC that this has been done
 - 3-hour Active Supervision course for all staff members
 - In addition, we created a new protocol and job position to "sweep" the classroom and playground (this was not required but added by us as an extra safety precaution)
 - All current staff must participate in a Regulations Review training given by OCC, licensing, any new staff members must take the review course within 60 days of hire.

Policies and procedures must be reviewed and evaluated to guarantee equity for community-based providers to participate in Blueprint. As a childcare owner, early childhood advocate, and MSCCA Frederick County Chapter President, I absolutely would

not encourage another childcare provider to participate in Blueprint. I was an advocate; I can no longer be as this punitive sentence is putting us at risk of being put out of business. How is this equitable? This must be corrected and addressed along with many other inequities.

I appreciate your time and thank you for your thoughtful consideration. I am available for questions.

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