

Hearing Testimony March 11, 2025
House Ways and Means Committee
Service Employees International Union, Local 500

HB1475

Office of Child Care Advisory Council - Publicly Funded Prekindergarten - Analysis and Report (Mixed Delivery Model Viability Act)

SUPPORT

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 FAVORABLE Report on HB1475, the Mixed Delivery Model Viability Act.

House Bill 1475 is a critical step in ensuring the viability of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future, specifically its Pillar 1 initiative, which seeks to establish a mixed delivery system for public PreK. Based on current challenges, it is clear that the mixed delivery system must be supported by legislative action to achieve long-term success, and HB1475 will go a long way in achieving that success. Maryland cannot afford to build new PreK classrooms. Instead, it is more efficient and effective to partner with existing community-based providers, utilizing their capacity to meet the Blueprint's goals while maintaining equity.

Almost all Local Education Agencies (LEAs) in Maryland have requested waivers due to their inability to meet the mixed delivery system's requirements in partnership with community-based programs. This indicates significant challenges and gaps in implementing the Blueprint as initially designed. A 2023 Accountability and Implementation Board's Private PreK report recognized these barriers and recommended establishing an Early Childhood Workgroup with MSDE to explore and address challenges in implementing mixed delivery. The Mixed Delivery Model Viability Act is a direct response to this recommendation, ensuring collaboration and systematic analysis to overcome current obstacles.

Child care is both an economic and equity issue, yet the current business model is unsustainable without including three- and four-year-olds in the system. Without careful analysis and collaboration, the mixed delivery system may lead to unintended consequences. Maryland faces a critical shortage in the early childhood workforce and a 15% decline in child care programs since the COVID-19 pandemic. The shortage of qualified personnel and the shrinking number of providers further underscores the importance of legislation like HB 1475 to stabilize and support the early childhood sector. Maryland

must work to address these challenges by ensuring the sustainability of this system through thoughtful legislative action

The current implementation of the Pillar 1 sliding scale is divisive and confusing, creating potential gaps between public schools and community-based programs. This misalignment has the potential to further decrease the viability of the mixed delivery system. HB 1475 aims to simplify and address these issues, creating a more cohesive and viable framework. While both public schools and community-based programs fall under the authority of MSDE, the disparities between their policies, funding, oversight, staff qualifications, and workdays present challenges in the mixed delivery system. There are several discrepancies and inequities between state policies regulating community-based providers and public PreK providers, including reimbursement methods, quality rating systems, and funding mechanisms. HB 1475 addresses these inconsistencies and creates a pathway for a more equitable and efficient mixed delivery system. Additionally, the legislation provides a plan to streamline administrative processes for private PreK providers, including establishing a centralized substitute teacher pool and exploring opportunities for pooling resources among providers to offer employee benefits.

HB 1475 actively engages practitioners, proximity experts, and stakeholders through the Governor's Office of Child Care Advisory Council. This collaboration ensures that feedback from public and private PreK providers, as well as child care providers, is considered in shaping future recommendations for improving the system. Importantly, this bill also includes a roadmap and a defined timeline for reporting to state leaders and policymakers, providing a structured approach to improving the implementation of Blueprint Pillar 1. This ensures accountability and continuous progress towards achieving the Blueprint's goals.

HB 1475 is vital to ensuring that Maryland's mixed delivery system for PreK education works successfully for all children, families, and providers. The legislation addresses critical issues, supports collaboration, and creates a clear framework for overcoming existing challenges.

We strongly urge the committee to return a favorable report on HB1475 to make the Blueprint for Maryland's Future a reality for all Maryland families.