

Dear Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins and Honorable Members of the Ways and Means Committee,

My name is Patti Smith and I am a childcare provider from Greenbelt Maryland. I am here today to firmly express my strong support for the For Our Kids Act (House Bill 1469), which will promote healthier choices for Maryland's children and support working families by increasing access to nutritious school meals and affordable childcare through a sugary drink tax.

The bill will also provide much-needed funding for childcare scholarships, making quality care more affordable and accessible for working families. As Maryland looks for ways to plug a \$3 billion hole in its budget I ask that you please don't make cuts to the vital child care scholarship program and support the For Our Kids Act.

Cuts would likely cost working parents forcing them to choose between paying for necessities and securing a safe nurturing environment for their children. Cuts would also be detrimental to essential child care programs that are struggling to navigate the uncharted waters of Maryland's Blueprint for Education. As a program that enrolls 50% of its children on scholarships this program needs to be fully funded. Changes could shutter child care businesses that primarily enroll scholarship recipients, parents may be forced to leave the workforce if they can't pay increased tuition or even worse parents may turn unlicensed/unsafe care for their children. By investing in childcare, we are investing in the future success of Maryland's kids, the For Our Kids Act is a vital step toward securing the funds from a sugary drink tax to ensure that all children, regardless of income, have access to the nutrition and care they need to thrive. I urge you all to support HB 1469.

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