

HB 561 Extend Funding for the Maryland Child Care Credential Program

The Maryland Child Care Credential Program works. It's one of the few workforce supports in our early care and education system that actually recognizes what we say we value: educators and providers who go beyond minimum licensing requirements, keep learning, and keep improving practice for children and families. The Credential Program is a clear, concrete incentive built into Maryland's workforce lattice, and it's already embedded in the quality systems many programs are working hard to meet—Maryland EXCELS, Maryland Accreditation, and the expectations set in law through HB 1441.

But a program can't do what it was designed to do if the funding underneath it is unstable.

HB 561 matters because it protects the integrity of the Credential Program by extending foundational funding beginning in FY 2028. That may sound like a technical budget detail, but on the ground, it's the difference between a meaningful incentive and an empty promise. When funding is uncertain, the message to educators is clear: don't count on this. And when educators can't count on it, fewer people take on the extra coursework, the extra training hours, the extra effort it takes to reach higher credential levels. Programs lose one of their few reliable tools for encouraging professional growth. Quality improvement slows down - not because people don't care, but because the system stops backing up the work with real support.

This is also a small business issue. Most childcare programs are operating on razor-thin margins, often less than 1%. Staffing is the biggest cost driver because ratios are non-negotiable, and tuition is largely parent-funded and limited by what families can afford. At the same time, childcare costs in Maryland can exceed \$30,000 a year, while the average childcare worker earns under \$30,000 annually. That mismatch is unsustainable, and every director and provider I know is constantly trying to do the impossible: keep tuition within reach, pay staff more, meet regulations, and still keep the doors open.

In that reality, the Credential Program isn't a "nice extra." It's a practical tool for recruitment and retention. It helps programs attract qualified staff, keep experienced educators, and recognize professional growth in a way that builds stability over time. When credential funding lapses or becomes unreliable, turnover increases, staffing becomes harder, and the entire program becomes more fragile. We don't just lose a benefit; we lose one of the few levers that support workforce stability in a field where stability is everything.

There's also an equity and economic reality we need to say out loud. The childcare workforce is primarily composed of diverse women of color. Childcare enables parents to work and keep Maryland's economy moving. Investing in credentialing is not only a quality strategy; it's an economic strategy and an equity commitment. When funding for credentialing is allowed to lapse, it signals that professional growth and workforce advancement are optional. That erodes trust across the provider community and weakens the infrastructure Maryland has worked to build.

As an MSDE-approved trainer for early childhood programs, I've seen the ripple effects when the Credential Program funding is unavailable. It shows up immediately in the professional learning choices programs are





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forced to make. Fewer childcare centers seek training, not because they don't value it, but because they can't justify the cost when the incentives and supports tied to credentialing feel shaky. Instead, educators and programs go searching for free professional development wherever they can find it, often meaning online, self-paced options that may check a box but don't meet Maryland's specific requirements or the real needs of classrooms. Just as importantly, those options can't replace the human, responsive support an approved trainer provides: the ability to tailor content to a program's context, answer questions in the moment, adjust based on what staff are actually dealing with, and offer the relationship-based coaching that strengthens practice over time. When funding disappears, we don't just lose a benefit. We lose access to the kind of high-quality, relevant, flexible learning that builds a stable workforce and improves instruction for children.

HB 561 is a straightforward, responsible step: extend foundational funding for the Maryland Child Care Credential Program beginning in FY 2028, stabilize childcare businesses, and demonstrate Maryland's commitment to the early childhood workforce. It also strengthens alignment across quality initiatives by supporting an ongoing career lattice connected to professional development—so programs aren't chasing disconnected requirements but are building toward a system that actually makes sense and supports educators in staying.

Maryland cannot afford to weaken a program that supports children and the workforce behind the workforce. Investing in credentialing strengthens quality, workforce stability, small business sustainability, and Maryland's economy. I urge you to support HB 561.

