

I am writing to you on behalf of Hilltop Early Learning Center, Clarksville, MD, to express our support for SB 467. This bill would make significant strides in protecting and preserving the Maryland Child Care Credential Program for years to come.

For more than 20 years, the Maryland Child Care Credential Program recognized the dedicated child care providers who exceed basic licensing standards. Participants in the credential program worked hard and were incentivized to become active members of the early childhood education community. The credential program has provided a career ladder and guide to encourage professional development and growth in our industry. It has allowed our staff to demonstrate our dedication to ongoing learning and evolving pedagogy—we view ourselves as lifelong learners who are always striving to learn more in our field and try new things in our classrooms.

Our program is a small nonprofit preschool program. We function on very thin economic margins and are constantly balancing our financial needs with the burden working families face in paying for child care. The Maryland Child Care Credential Program has provided necessary funds that allow our staff to participate in consistent professional development and continued learning without placing further strain on our program's budget or our families' pocketbooks. The Child Care Credential Program also provided monetary incentives for child care workers who demonstrated exemplary commitment to becoming experts in their field. As we all recognize, child care workers are a historically underpaid workforce (many earning less than \$30,000 per year despite working full-time hours). These monetary achievement bonuses made a significant impact on employees' financial wellbeing and personal morale. The Child Care Credential Program creates stability in our field and lessens staff turnover.

I first started working in the child care field in the summer of 2014. At that time, I was inexperienced and had minimal education in the field. When my program director introduced me to the Child Care Credential Program, it gave me a road map to my future. With the help of the Child Care Credential Program, I was motivated and guided as I pursued multiple degrees in our field and progressed from a classroom aid to the associate director of our program. It is my sincere wish that all early childhood education professionals be able to benefit from the Child Care Credential Program for years to come.

Cortney Cabrera

Hilltop Early Learning Center

12121 Linden Linthicum Lane

Clarksville, MD 21029