



March 23, 2026

Testimony in Support of House Bill 849 – Child Care Scholarship Program Freeze in Enrollment Exceptions

We respectfully urge the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee to issue a favorable report on HB 849 with amendments. The Child Care Scholarship Program is one of Maryland's most important tools for supporting working families, strengthening our economy, and sustaining a stable child care workforce. Like any good tool, it can be adapted to address newly occurring needs during unprecedented times.

We thank the General Assembly for considering adding more funding to the Child Care Scholarship Program to serve more children on the waitlist – as, ultimately, we hope that enough funding could be appropriated to the program to lift the freeze entirely and that discussions of prioritizing the waitlist will no longer be needed. However, until that time is possible, our community agrees with the exemptions and prioritizations as listed in HB849: prioritizing families with the lowest incomes and the youngest children.

HB 849 also includes a prioritization of individuals who are employed by child care centers or family child care homes. We strongly agree with this element of the legislation, as we see this as a critical step towards supporting the early childhood workforce, which is severely undercompensated and facing a critical shortage. This policy would help stabilize the workforce, reduce barriers to employment, and send a clear message that Maryland values the professionals who make it possible for families across the state to work.

It is important to point out that this legislation should be a temporary solution to a deeply entrenched issue that still must be addressed. The child care system is built on a fundamentally flawed economic model, in which the true costs of providing quality services are more than parents are able to pay. The federal government recommends that, for it to be considered affordable, families should spend 7% of their income on child care. This would mean *a family of an infant in Montgomery County would need to make at more than \$450,00 annually to "afford" center-based care.* Child care affordability is a problem faced by the majority of Marylanders, not just those in the low-income households currently eligible for the Child Care Scholarship Program. If Maryland is a state that values its young children and the adults that care for them, we need to do more to prioritize investments that will improve outcomes for children.

Families, children, and child care educators and programs have been suffering during this freeze on the Scholarship and we are grateful for modifications that will begin to ease this stress.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Laura Jahromi".

Laura Jahromi, Manager, Strategic Initiatives
The Montgomery County Children's Opportunity Alliance
1801 Rockville Pike, Rockville, MD 20852 | 301-450-1871 |
laura@mocochildren.org

The Montgomery County [Children's Opportunity Alliance](https://www.mocochildren.org) connects our community to build an equitable, accessible, high-quality, and sustainable early childhood system that narrows disparities and puts all young children on a path to reach their greatest potential.