

**BERNICE MIREKU-NORTH, ESQ.**  
*Legislative District 14*  
Montgomery County

Ways and Means Committee

*Chair*

Child Care Subcommittee

Early Childhood and  
Special Education Subcommittee



The Maryland House of Delegates  
6 Bladen Street, Room 222  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401  
410-841-3539  
800-492-7122 Ext. 3539  
Bernice.Mireku-North@house.maryland.gov

**THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES**  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**Testimony in Support of House Bill 849: Child Care Scholarship Program - Freeze in Enrollment – Exceptions**  
**March 25th, 2026**

Chairs Feldman and Guzzone, Vice Chairs Kagan and Rosapepe, and esteemed members of the Senate Committees on Education, Energy and the Environment and Budget and Taxation, I come before you today to offer testimony in favor of House Bill 849: Child Care Scholarship Program - Freeze in Enrollment - Exceptions.

As amended, this bill prohibits a freeze in enrollment in the Child Care Scholarship (CCS) Program from applying to (1) a family or an individual who is enrolled in the Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA) Program; (2) a family or an individual who is enrolled in the federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program; (3) a child, parent, or guardian who is enrolled in the federal Supplemental Security Income (SSI) Program (or a sibling); (4) the sibling of a child who is enrolled in the program; and (5) a homeless child. The bill requires the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) to establish a waitlist. The waitlist must give priority, in order, to: (1) families with the greatest need; (2) applicants who work for a child care center, a family child care home, a large family child care home, or a publicly funded pre-kindergarten provider who accepts children enrolled in the program; (3) applicants enrolling a child under the age of 3; and (4) those on the waitlist the longest. The bill takes effect July 1, 2026, contingent on the passage of House Bill 1321.

**Exceptions to the Freeze:**

Families receiving TANF or TCA are, by definition, among the lowest-income families in our State. Access to child care is especially critical for these groups, as it is a requirement for work participation, job training, and compliance with TANF/TCA program rules. If these families lose

access to child care and aren't able to work, they risk losing cash assistance altogether, deepening financial instability and increasing reliance on other public supports.

Children receiving Supplemental Security Income often have disabilities or significant medical needs. Stable, consistent child care is critical for their development and well-being. Interruptions in care can be especially harmful for children who rely on routine and specialized support. Extending this protection to the siblings of SSI-enrolled children recognizes that families cannot easily split children between different care arrangements. When one child in a family qualifies, the entire family unit benefits from continuity of care.

Siblings of enrolled children benefit from continuity and family stability. Allowing one child to enroll while denying another creates logistical and financial stress for parents, disrupts family routines, and may force families to leave care entirely. Keeping siblings together supports consistent attendance and strengthens outcomes for children and providers alike.

Housing instability presents some of the most acute and urgent challenges a family can face. For homeless children, access to stable child care is often a prerequisite for parents to secure employment, attend housing-related appointments, and work toward permanent housing. Placing a homeless child on a waitlist at the moment of greatest family crisis undermines the very stability that child care is meant to provide. Ensuring that no homeless child is denied access to the CCS Program because of an enrollment freeze reflects a fundamental commitment to reaching those in the most precarious circumstances.

**Waitlist Prioritization:**

In addition to protecting certain groups from a freeze entirely, this bill requires MSDE to establish an ordered waitlist for all other eligible families. The bill establishes four ordered priority groups, each reflecting a deliberate policy judgment:

The first and highest priority on the waitlist goes to families with the greatest financial need. These are expected to be those at or below the federal poverty level or at 10 percent or less of State Median Income. The CCS Program exists to serve low-income families, and when

resources are constrained, it is essential that they flow first to those who are most economically vulnerable. Placing financial need at the top of the priority order ensures that a freeze does not inadvertently protect families with relatively more resources while shutting out those who have none.

Workers employed at child care centers, family child care homes, large family child care homes, and publicly funded pre-K providers who accept CCS-enrolled children are given the second tier of waitlist priority. Many child care professionals earn modest wages and may themselves qualify for assistance. Supporting them strengthens the early childhood workforce, reduces turnover, and ensures that providers can continue operating. The early education system cannot function if the people who run it cannot access the very benefits their programs provide. This prioritization is a key priority of the Maryland State Child Care Association, and it reflects a recognition that the workforce sustaining child care in Maryland deserves to be part of the solution, not left behind by it.

The research is clear that the earliest years of a child's life are the most critical for brain development, attachment, and long-term outcomes. Infant and toddler care is also the most expensive and the hardest to find, making families with very young children especially vulnerable when a freeze occurs. Giving third-tier priority to applicants enrolling a child under age 3 reflects both the developmental urgency of this period and the scarcity of affordable infant-toddler care in Maryland's child care market.

The final priority tier ensures that no family waits indefinitely without movement. Families who have been on the waitlist the longest, having already demonstrated persistence and ongoing need, should eventually be served. Within a category, the waitlist will use lower priority categories as a tie breaker.

### **Updating the Application Process:**

The bill as amended also requires MSDE to update its CCS application forms to accommodate the new waitlist structure, ensuring families can accurately indicate their circumstances so that MSDE can correctly assign priority status.

Finally, the bill as amended requires MSDE to review the process it currently uses to determine whether an applicant is attending a job training program. Participation in a work-related activity or training program is one pathway to meeting the CCS Program's eligibility requirements. Ensuring that MSDE's verification process is accurate, consistent, and accessible is critical to protecting applicants who rely on training programs as their primary qualifying activity.

HB 849, a Legislative Black Caucus priority, does not expand eligibility beyond existing standards or eliminate the State's ability to manage enrollment. It does not call for certain groups to be prioritized for the Child Care Scholarship over others without justification. It simply ensures that when freezes occur, they do not fall hardest on families in crisis, children with heightened needs, or the very workforce that sustains our early childhood education system. The amendments described above reflect a good-faith effort to balance the bill's protective intent with MSDE's administrative and fiscal capacity. For these reasons, I respectfully request a favorable report on House Bill 849.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bernice Mireku-North". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

The Honorable Bernice Mireku-North, Esq.  
Delegate. Maryland Legislative District 14  
Maryland House of Delegates