

HB1321
Child Care Scholarship Program - Application Process and Copays - Alterations
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
3/25/2026
Favorable with amendments

Catholic Charities supports with amendments HB1321, which requires the State Department of Education to identify, inform, and assist Child Care Scholarship Program applicants who qualify for enrollment in publicly funded prekindergarten, Head Start, and Early Head Start subject to certain conditions; requiring the process for identifying and assisting eligible applicants whose children qualify for a program to continue as long as the waitlist is in effect; and limiting certain copays for certain individuals under the Program.

For more than a century, Catholic Charities has served Marylanders in need, walking alongside individuals and families as they work toward stability and opportunity. We support children in preparing for educational success, help parents secure and maintain employment, and ensure families can access the services they need to thrive.

Through this work, we see firsthand that access to affordable, high-quality childcare remains one of the most significant barriers facing working families. The Child Care Scholarship program is a critical support that allows parents to stay in the workforce, pursue economic mobility, and connect their children to early learning opportunities that set the foundation for lifelong success.

However, we also see the gaps. Some eligible families begin the Child Care Scholarship application process but are ultimately unable to participate because the required co-pay makes care financially out of reach. For families already struggling to make ends meet, even modest co-pay can be the difference between accessing care and going without.

As long as there is a waitlist for the Child Care Scholarship program and as the State works to expand access, it is essential that participation remains truly affordable for the families it is intended to serve. For this reason, Catholic Charities strongly supports amendments to HB 1321 that establish clear guardrails around the co-pay structure.

As currently drafted, the bill does not define co-pay limits in statute, leaving open the possibility that future changes could make the program unaffordable for low-income families. To ensure long-term accessibility and equity, we urge the Committee to adopt amendments that require co-pays to be reasonably and affordably tiered based on income.

By strengthening these provisions, HB 1321 can better fulfill its promise, connecting more children to early education and supporting working families across Maryland.

For these reasons, Catholic Charities respectfully urges the Committee to issue a **favorable report with amendments** on HB 1321.

Submitted By: Madelin Martinez, Assistant Director of Advocacy