



Testimony - HB 1321, Child Care Scholarship Program - Child Care Scholarship
Program - Application Process and Copays - Alterations
Favorable w/ Amendments
Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
March 25, 2026
Elly Cowan on Behalf of SEIU Local 500

Honorable Chairman Feldman & Members of the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee:

SEIU Local 500 represents thousands of working families across Maryland, including public school employees, higher education workers, and early childhood educators who rely on affordable, accessible child care in order to work. HB 1321 makes important, targeted improvements to Maryland’s Child Care Scholarship Program that will strengthen access, affordability, and stability for working families—particularly those with the greatest need. We strongly support amending HB 1321 to place guardrails in statute that ensure the co-pay structure is affordably tiered for low-income households.

First, this legislation ensures that even during an enrollment freeze, our most vulnerable families are not shut out of critical childcare assistance. By exempting families receiving Temporary Cash Assistance, children experiencing homelessness, and those receiving SSI or TANF from enrollment freezes, HB 1321 recognizes that childcare is not optional—it is essential for families working to stabilize their lives and participate in the workforce.

Second, the bill creates a transparent and equitable waitlist process when enrollment is capped, prioritizing families with the greatest financial need and those with young children. This is a significant step toward fairness and accountability, ensuring that limited resources are distributed based on need rather than access or timing alone.

Third, HB 1321 takes meaningful steps to reduce the financial burden on working families by limiting copayments. By eliminating copays entirely for families at or below

the federal poverty level and capping copays at reasonable percentages of income for others, the bill helps ensure that childcare assistance actually makes childcare affordable. Too often, even subsidized care remains out of reach due to high copays—this bill directly addresses that barrier.

Additionally, the bill improves coordination across early childhood systems by requiring the State Department of Education to connect families to publicly funded pre-K, Head Start, and Early Head Start programs when appropriate. This is a smart, family-centered approach that helps maximize available resources and ensures families are aware of all their options. However, as drafted, HB 1321 does not outline the co-pay structure in statute, which leaves families vulnerable to a future administration implementing co-pays that would make the childcare scholarship program out of reach for many Marylanders because of affordability. Therefore we amending the bill to ensure co-pays are affordably tiered and explicitly outlined in statute.

SEIU Local 500 members see firsthand how access to affordable childcare impacts workers' ability to stay employed, pursue education, and support their families. When childcare is unstable or unaffordable, it forces working parents—disproportionately women and workers of color—out of the workforce or into impossible choices.

HB 1321 helps build a more equitable and functional childcare system that supports both families and the broader economy.

For these reasons, we urge a favorable report on House Bill 1321.

Thank you for your time and consideration.