



Testimony - HB 849, Child Care Scholarship Program - Freeze in Enrollment -  
Exceptions and Waitlist  
Favorable  
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 more than 20,000 education workers and public employees across Maryland, including family childcare providers and strongly supports House Bill 849, which establishes critical protections for vulnerable families in the event of a freeze in enrollment in the Child Care Scholarship Program.

Child care assistance is not a luxury — it is essential infrastructure that allows working families to participate in the workforce and keeps Maryland’s economy running. When enrollment freezes occur in the Child Care Scholarship Program, the families most in need are often the first to suffer. House Bill 849 establishes critical protections to ensure that even during a freeze, the most vulnerable Marylanders are not shut out of access to child care.

The bill thoughtfully safeguards access to scholarships for families enrolled in Temporary Cash Assistance and federal TANF programs, children receiving Supplemental Security Income, siblings of children already enrolled in the program, and children experiencing homelessness. These provisions recognize that stability in child care is essential for child development and family economic security.

The legislation also protects workers facing sudden job loss or involuntary furlough due to government shutdowns. Families should not lose access to child care assistance because of circumstances beyond their control. Allowing recently unemployed individuals to maintain eligibility ensures they can search for work and return to employment more quickly.

Importantly, the bill recognizes the importance of the child care workforce itself. Individuals employed by child care centers and family child care homes are foundational to Maryland's early childhood system. Ensuring they maintain access to child care assistance strengthens workforce retention in a sector that continues to face staffing shortages.

The House amendments further strengthen the bill by requiring the Maryland State Department of Education to establish a waitlist when enrollment is frozen and by creating a transparent priority structure for future enrollment. This ensures that families with the greatest financial need, members of the child care workforce, families with very young children, and those waiting the longest are prioritized when slots reopen.

House Bill 849 strikes an appropriate balance. It preserves the State's ability to manage fiscal constraints while ensuring that vulnerable families, critical workers, and children most in need remain connected to care.

SEIU Local 500 respectfully urges a favorable report on House Bill 849.

Thank you for your time and consideration.