



Testimony - HB 281, Family Law - Child Care Providers - Criminal Background
Investigations

Favorable with Amendments

House Judiciary Committee

February 5, 2026

Elly Cowan on Behalf of SEIU Local 500

Honorable Chairwoman Bartlett & Members of the House Judiciary Committee:

On behalf of SEIU Local 500, which represents child care providers across Maryland, we respectfully submit this testimony in support of House Bill 281 with amendments.

SEIU Local 500 strongly supports policies that protect the safety and well-being of children and families. Ensuring appropriate criminal background checks for individuals who care for children is a serious responsibility, and HB 281 makes important updates to clarify and strengthen these processes—particularly in emergency and informal care situations where children may be especially vulnerable.

At the same time, we must be clear: the cost of these background checks cannot and should not be shifted onto child care providers themselves.

Many of Maryland's child care providers—especially family child care providers—are already operating on extremely thin margins. They are overwhelmingly women, disproportionately women of color, and are among the lowest-paid workers in our state. Requiring providers to shoulder new or expanded background check fees would create a real financial barrier to work, drive providers out of the field, and worsen the child care shortage facing families across Maryland.

Public safety is a shared responsibility. It is appropriate for the State to require background checks—but it is also the State's responsibility to ensure those checks are funded in a way that does not punish workers for complying with the law.

Therefore, SEIU Local 500 urges the Committee to:

- Ensure that any fees associated with criminal background checks required under HB 281 are paid by the State or the responsible agency—not by individual child care providers or workers; and
- Make explicit in statute or implementation that child care providers will not be required to cover the cost of fingerprinting, processing, or federal background check fees.

HB 281 can advance child safety without creating new economic burdens for the very workers who care for our children every day. With this important clarification and commitment, SEIU Local 500 urges a favorable report on HB 281.

Thank you for your time and consideration.