

My name is Emily Kreutner, and I serve as Director of CX at Upwards. I'm writing today in strong support of HB1245 and I want to address you not just as a program administrator, but as someone who helped build what this bill seeks to expand.

In January of 2024, Upwards partnered with the Baltimore Police Department to launch the Childcare Support and Accessibility Project. The premise was straightforward but urgent: first responders work 24-hour, nontraditional schedules, and the childcare system was not built for them. Parents working nights, weekends, and rotating shifts were left to figure it out on their own or leave the job.

BPD's child care program offered two things: a direct allowance of up to \$400 per month, flexible enough to be used across provider types, and personalized childcare navigation assistance - matching families to vetted providers, including those offering nontraditional hours, bilingual care, and care for children with special needs.

Over the last 2 years, we have seen 511 BPD employees engaged with the program. 52% of participants said they would likely leave their job without this support. And the officers most at risk were early-career officers - the very people Baltimore City is working hardest to recruit and retain.

Childcare is a workforce issue. When an officer can't find care for a Wednesday night shift or a weekend rotation, that's not just a family problem - it's a staffing problem and a public safety problem.

This bill asks us to do something we already know how to do. The infrastructure is built. The provider network is vetted. The technology is in place and we're ready to scale to support first-responders across fire and EMS, as well as the police force.

I urge this committee to pass HB1245. The evidence is there. The program is ready. Our first responders have earned this.

Thank you.