



HB1373 - State Department of Education - Independent Regulatory Framework for After School and Out-of-School Time Child Care Programs - Study
Ways & Means Committee - March 11, 2026
Position: Favorable

The Maryland Out of School Time Network (MOST) is a statewide organization dedicated to closing opportunity gaps by expanding the quantity and quality of afterschool and summer learning opportunities for young people. MOST also serves as the backbone organization for the Maryland Coalition for Community Schools and MENTOR Maryland | DC.

We are writing in support of House Bill 1373. This legislation addresses a long-standing gap in Maryland's child care regulatory framework, and we are grateful to Delegate Martinez for introducing it.

Maryland's child care licensing and quality assurance systems were designed primarily with early childhood programs in mind — and they do that work well. Credentialing pathways, training requirements, and quality observation tools like EXCELS are built around the developmental needs of children under five, and the environments that serve them. School-age children and the programs that serve them have meaningfully different needs, and the current regulatory framework does not adequately reflect that distinction.

This is not a new concern. School-age providers and advocates have been raising these issues for many years and have engaged constructively with the Maryland State Department of Education toward differentiated regulations. Progress has been made at the margins, but the fundamental mismatch between early childhood-focused regulations and the realities of school-age programs has never been fully resolved. HB1373 offers an opportunity to finally do that work seriously and systematically.

The stakes are significant. School-age children represent approximately 46% of Child Care Development Block Grant spending in Maryland. Yet the policy infrastructure governing those programs has not kept pace with that scale or with the distinct nature of afterschool and out-of-school time care.

The bill rightly directs MSDE to examine space, staffing, and ratio requirements. These three issues sit at the heart of why providers struggle to operate and why families struggle to find slots. Current requirements for early childhood settings can make it functionally impossible for programs operating in shared spaces like schools and community centers to enter or remain in compliance. The result is constrained supply at a time when demand for school-age care far exceeds what the market provides. If we want to expand access, we have to be honest about the regulatory barriers that are limiting it.

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We would also encourage the study to give serious consideration to a registered-but-exempt category of programs. These programs would meet defined baseline health and safety standards, be subject to compliance visits, but would not be required to meet full licensing requirements. They would also not be eligible to accept child care scholarship dollars. This kind of tiered approach could bring currently unmonitored programs into a structured oversight framework, improving safety and accountability for families without imposing requirements designed for a different type of program. Many programs operating in school and community settings do not consider themselves "child care" and therefore fall entirely outside regulatory visibility. A lighter-touch registration pathway could change that.

We also want to emphasize that the statewide afterschool network and school-age providers should be genuine partners in this redesign process; not just consulted, but meaningfully engaged in shaping the recommendations. The expertise about what works, what creates barriers, and what families actually need lives in those programs and networks.

One practical note on implementation: the bill calls for a final report by December 1, 2026 roughly five months after the July 1 effective date. Given the breadth of the study's scope and the importance of thorough stakeholder engagement, the committee may want to consider whether that timeline provides sufficient time to do this work well. A rushed process risks producing recommendations that don't hold up, and these questions deserve careful treatment.

We urge the committee to give HB1373 a favorable report. It is a measured, constructive step toward a regulatory system that actually fits the programs it governs and toward a Maryland where more families can access the school-age care they need.

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