



Testimony - HB 659, State Board of Education - Membership - Early Childhood
Development Professional
Favorable
House Ways & Means Committee
February 18, 2026
Elly Cowan on Behalf of SEIU Local 500

Honorable Chairwoman Wilkins & Members of the House Ways & Means Committee:

SEIU Local 500 represents over 20,000 working people in Maryland, Washington D.C., and Virginia. Our union represents the support staff at the Montgomery County Public School system, Family Child Care Providers, Faculty and Staff at several Maryland colleges and universities, staff at non-profits and many other working people across the region. We urge a FAVORABLE Report on HB659– State Board of Education — Membership — Early Childhood Development Professional. This legislation would add an early childhood development professional as a voting member of the Maryland State Board of Education — ensuring that the child care workforce has meaningful representation in statewide education policymaking, while not adding to the overall size of the Board.

SEIU Local 500 represents thousands of education and public service workers across Maryland, including early childhood educators and child care providers who are foundational to our state’s learning system and economy. These professionals care for and educate Maryland’s youngest learners during the most critical years of brain development. Yet, despite their expertise and impact, their voice is not formally represented at the highest level of state education governance.

HB 659 is a practical and important step toward correcting that gap.

Early childhood educators operate within a complex regulatory, financial, and instructional environment. They navigate licensing requirements, workforce shortages, professional development standards, and evolving curriculum expectations — all while providing safe, nurturing, and developmentally appropriate care for children. Policies

adopted by the State Board of Education directly affect this workforce and the sustainability of the child care sector. Including a member with extensive experience in operating child care programs and understanding early childhood curriculum will strengthen the Board's deliberations and improve policy outcomes.

Maryland has made significant investments in early childhood education in recent years. As the State continues to align birth-to-five systems with K–12 education, it is essential that those with direct experience in early childhood development help shape the decisions that affect providers and families. A dedicated early childhood professional on the Board will ensure that policies reflect real-world implementation challenges and workforce realities.

HB 659 also affirms that child care professionals are educators — skilled, trained, and deeply knowledgeable practitioners whose insight is vital to educational leadership. Representation matters. When those most affected by policy have a seat at the table, governance improves and outcomes strengthen.

For these reasons, SEIU Local 500 urges the Committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 659.

Thank you for your time and consideration.