



Testimony - HB 539, Child Care Centers - Teacher Qualifications - Alterations  
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 respectfully submits this testimony in strong support of House Bill 539. This legislation would require the State Board of Education to establish a pathway allowing individuals who are qualified to serve as child care teachers—but who lack formal proof of educational attainment—to attest to their credentials and demonstrate eligibility to work in licensed child care centers.

SEIU Local 500 represents thousands of early childhood educators and child care professionals across Maryland. We support HB 539 because it creates meaningful opportunity for refugees, immigrants, and internationally trained educators who are eager to work in child care but face documentation barriers that prevent them from doing so.

Maryland's child care system depends on a diverse and culturally responsive workforce. Many refugees and immigrants arrive in our state with education degrees, teaching experience, or extensive early childhood training from their home countries. However, due to displacement, conflict, or the realities of migration, they may not have access to transcripts or official documentation required under current regulations. As a result, highly qualified individuals are often unable to work in child care programs, even as providers across Maryland struggle with severe staffing shortages.

HB 539 addresses this gap in a practical and responsible way. By creating an attestation pathway under the oversight of the State Board of Education, Maryland can maintain quality standards while recognizing legitimate experience and training that may not be documented through traditional U.S. credentialing systems.

This bill would expand workforce access at a time when child care providers are facing critical staffing shortages and reduce unnecessary barriers that disproportionately impact internationally trained professionals and displaced individuals. Additionally, and just as importantly, it would support economic stability for refugee and immigrant families by allowing skilled adults to enter a profession aligned with their background and experience and strengthen culturally responsive care, ensuring children from diverse communities see educators who reflect their languages and lived experiences.

Importantly, this legislation does not weaken standards. Instead, it directs the State Board to establish a structured process for verifying qualifications when traditional documentation is unavailable. This is a balanced and thoughtful approach that both protects quality and expands opportunity.

Maryland has long prided itself on being a welcoming state. HB 539 aligns our child care policies with that commitment by ensuring that refugees and immigrants who are ready and qualified to serve Maryland's youngest learners are not excluded due to circumstances beyond their control.

For these reasons, SEIU Local 500 urges the Committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 539.

Thank you for your time and consideration.