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Ways and Means Committee

Chair

Child Care Subcommittee

Early Childhood and
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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
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Testimony in Support of House Bill 849: Child Care Scholarship Program - Freeze in Enrollment - Exceptions
March 4th, 2026

Chairs Wilkins and Barnes, Vice Chairs Feldmark and Kaiser, and esteemed members of the House Ways and Means and Appropriations Committees. I come before you today to offer testimony in favor of **House Bill 849: Child Care Scholarship Program - Freeze in Enrollment - Exceptions**. This bill codifies into statute existing exemptions from Child Care Scholarship enrollment freezes for families receiving Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA), families receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), children receiving Supplemental Security Income, and siblings of currently enrolled children. It also extends those protections to individuals recently unemployed and workers employed directly in child care.

Families receiving TANF or TCA are, by definition, among the lowest-income families in our state. Access to child care is especially critical for these groups, as it is a requirement for work participation, job training, and compliance with TANF/TCA program rules. If these families lose access to child care and aren't able to work, they risk losing cash assistance altogether, deepening financial instability and increasing reliance on other public supports.

Children receiving Supplemental Security Income often have disabilities or significant medical needs. Stable, consistent child care is critical for their development and well-being. Interruptions in care can be especially harmful for children who rely on routine and specialized support.

Siblings of enrolled children benefit from continuity and family stability. Allowing one child to enroll while denying another creates logistical and financial stress for parents, disrupts family routines, and may force families to leave care entirely. Keeping siblings together supports consistent attendance and strengthens outcomes for children and providers alike.

For recently unemployed individuals, access to child care is essential for attending job interviews, participating in workforce programs, and reentering employment quickly. Denying assistance at the point of job loss only prolongs unemployment and increases economic hardship. Protecting this group helps families regain stability faster and reduces long-term public costs.

Finally, workers employed directly in child care are the backbone of Maryland's early education system. Many child care professionals earn modest wages and may qualify for assistance themselves. Supporting them strengthens the workforce, reduces turnover, and ensures that providers can continue operating. It is both practical and fair to ensure that those who make child care possible can access it when needed. This inclusion is a priority of the Maryland State Child Care Association.

My office has been actively working with the Maryland State Department of Education on this bill and has determined that including furloughed federal workers as it originally says in the bill is logistically infeasible. As such, the bill will be amended to no longer include federal employees affected by government shutdowns from the list of individuals mandated to be exempt from Child Care Scholarship Program freezes.

HB 849, a Legislative Black Caucus priority, does not expand eligibility beyond existing standards or eliminate the State's ability to manage enrollment. It also does not call for certain groups to be prioritized for the Child Care Scholarship over others. It simply ensures that when freezes occur, they do not fall hardest on families in crisis, children with heightened needs, or the very workforce that sustains the system. For these reasons, I respectfully request a favorable report on House Bill 849.



The Honorable Bernice Mireku-North, Esq.
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