

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 748

Early Childhood Educator Career Ladder

House Ways and Means Committee

Position: FAVORABLE With AMENDMENT

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Family Child Care Alliance of Maryland (FCCAMD)

I. Position Statement and Bill Summary

The Family Child Care Alliance of Maryland (FCCAMD), the statewide professional organization representing family child care providers, supports House Bill 748 and respectfully requests a favorable report with amendments.

What the bill does: HB 748 revises timelines in the Early Childhood Educator Career Ladder. The bill addresses timelines for both teaching assistants and experience-pathway lead teachers. This testimony focuses on the impact to lead teachers in family child care settings.

HB 748 began as a technical correction intended to keep the experience-based pathway created by Chapter 165 (HB 1441, 2024 Session) continuously accessible to new entrants. As amended, the bill includes a provision requiring an associate degree in early childhood education within six months after qualifying as a lead teacher for certain experience-pathway educators. An associate degree cannot be completed in six months in an accredited program. In practice, this functions as an upfront degree requirement, not an experience pathway.

FCCAMD supports the intent of maintaining strong standards and accountability. FCCAMD's recommendation is to amend the six-month completion requirement to a completion timeline that is demanding but workable, such as within four years after qualifying as a lead teacher, and to require an approved degree completion plan within six months as the early accountability checkpoint.

II. Why Family Child Care Matters for PreK Seats

Maryland's PreK expansion requires capacity beyond what public school classrooms can provide, particularly in communities without center-based options. Family child care (FCC) homes are a necessary part of the mixed-delivery system. In addition, the small, home-like environment and smaller group sizes are preferred by many parents for their children under 5.

FCCAMD's ASPIRE PreK program currently supports over 10% of all privately delivered, publicly funded PreK seats statewide, across 18 jurisdictions and encompassing 98 of the 101 PreK programs approved by the state in FCC. A brief program overview is provided in Attachment A.

The General Assembly recognized the importance of expanding the FCC workforce pipeline when it created the experience-based pathway in HB 1441.

III. What HB 1441 Changed and What It Was Designed to Enable

Prior to HB 1441, Maryland required that at least one teacher in a publicly funded PreK classroom hold a state early childhood certification (PreK–3 licensure). Family child care educators commonly serve children from infancy through preschool, but their participation in publicly funded PreK is limited to teaching prekindergarten. A PreK–3 credential covers a broader grade span, including kindergarten through third grade, that family child care educators in home-based settings do not teach. In that context, the credential requirement extended beyond the role being funded and evaluated, creating a practical barrier to entry for otherwise qualified educators.

HB 1441 replaced that requirement with an experience-based career ladder, creating a pathway for qualified FCC educators to serve as lead PreK teachers through credential milestones, professional development requirements, and state-administered quality oversight.

HB 748 keeps that pathway continuously usable for new entrants who do not yet hold a bachelor's degree. Without it, the pathway becomes unavailable to new entrants without BAs as the fixed deadlines approach, shrinking the pool of potential providers, programs, and PreK seats in private settings.

IV. Quality Evidence: State Observation Data

The concern that educators without bachelor's degrees cannot deliver quality PreK instruction is not consistent with available classroom observation data from ASPIRE PreK educators.

Data source: Fall 2025 Instructional Quality Reviews (IQRs), administered by the Maryland State Department of Education through Pre-K Support Specialists using a standardized observation rubric.

Group 1: Seven Lead Teachers Holding Associate Degrees

Six of seven educators were rated at Strong or Exemplary levels by state specialists. These educators demonstrated consistent strengths in lesson planning, classroom environment, and instructional engagement. State specialists described two of these classrooms in language that reflects sustained, high-level practice:

"Continual best practice teacher as guide. Higher order thinking and intellectual skills are prioritized and supported throughout."

"Joy, enthusiasm and expertise. High choice, high child agency environment supported by excellent instructional support and strong relationships."

Group 2: Ten Educators Pursuing Associate Degrees

All ten entered the experience pathway in Fall 2025, when HB 1441 made it possible. All are enrolled in coursework at various stages of completion.

IQR performance in this group was comparable to the associate-degree group. Six of ten were rated at the Strong level. Shared strengths included warm and responsive classroom environments, developmentally appropriate practices, and open-ended questioning at a foundational level. Growth areas were incremental rather than categorical, centering on documentation systems, assessment implementation, and higher-order questioning depth.

The data indicates that instructional quality is present before degree completion.

Based on our experience, we can demonstrate that the experience pathway is not a shortcut. It is a controlled entry lane. It lets capable educators enter PreK while they complete a degree because Maryland requires real checkpoints along the way. Those checkpoints include credential milestones, required professional development, and state observation and oversight. Entry is conditional on demonstrated practice and continued progress, not just a single credential on day one.

V. The Problem: The Six-Month Clause Converts a Standing Pathway into an Upfront Degree Requirement

The General Assembly created the experience pathway to strengthen Maryland's workforce pipeline and protect mixed-delivery capacity. Workforce pipelines must remain open year after year to sustain capacity.

The amended bill requires an associate degree in early childhood education within six months after qualifying as a lead teacher for certain experience-pathway educators. An associate degree cannot be completed in six months in an accredited program. In practice, this functions as an upfront degree requirement, not an experience pathway.

That matters for PreK expansion. If the State's approach effectively requires an associate degree before an educator can realistically serve as a lead teacher, then the "experience pathway" ceases to function as an on-ramp for new entrants. It becomes a narrow lane for educators who already have the degree, or who have already completed nearly all requirements before entry. That is not what HB 1441 was designed to enable.

The result is predictable. Maryland will shrink the pool of potential new FCC providers eligible to offer public PreK at the same time the State is trying to expand access. That means fewer potential providers, programs, and seats in private settings.

VI. The Fix: Preserve a Standing Pathway with a Workable Completion Timeline and Early Accountability

FCCAMD supports the intent of HB 748 as a technical correction that protects the integrity of the experience-based pathway and supports Maryland's mixed-delivery PreK system. To accomplish that intent, the bill must be amended.

Recommendation: Strike the six-month associate degree completion requirement and replace it with a completion timeline that is demanding but workable, such as requiring the associate degree within four years after the date the individual qualifies as a lead teacher through the experience pathway.

Accountability checkpoint: If the committee wants an early checkpoint, require an approved degree completion plan within six months after qualifying, rather than requiring the degree itself within six months. This preserves urgency and accountability while aligning statute with how accredited degree programs actually operate.

This approach preserves the controlled entry lane established in HB 1441. It keeps standards and oversight intact, and it keeps the workforce pipeline continuously usable for future cohorts.

VII. Conclusion

Maryland's PreK expansion depends in part on sustained capacity in private settings, including family child care. The General Assembly created the experience-based lead teacher pathway in HB 1441 so qualified FCC educators could enter publicly funded PreK under credential milestones, professional development requirements, and state observation and oversight. Early state observation data shows that strong instructional practice can be present as educators progress through those milestones.

As amended, HB 748 includes an associate degree requirement within six months after qualifying as a lead teacher. An associate degree cannot be completed in six months in an accredited program. In practice, this functions as an upfront degree requirement, not an experience pathway. The practical effect is a smaller future pool of potential FCC PreK participants, programs, and seats, at the same time Maryland is working to expand access.

FCCAMD respectfully requests a favorable report with amendments consistent with the recommendation above.

Attachments:

Attachment A: ASPIRE PreK Program Overview

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ATTACHMENT A

About ASPIRE PreK

Family Child Care Alliance of Maryland

Origins

In 2018, a group of family child care providers and advocates began a conversation about gaps in support for FCC providers in Maryland. The group included the former president of the Maryland State Family Child Care Association, the former CEO of the National Association for Family Child Care, the Chair of Early Childhood Education at Montgomery College, senior staff from Teaching Strategies, and a founding board member of the National Child Care Association, among others.

Their goal was to create a professionally led nonprofit focused exclusively on the technical assistance, operational, and professional learning needs of FCC providers. The Family Child Care Alliance of Maryland (FCCAMD) was incorporated in October 2019.

In March 2020, the Alliance team pitched a pilot project to MSDE to bring FCC providers into the PreK Expansion Grant program. MSDE embraced the idea. By September 2020, during a global pandemic, Alliance board members had designed the pilot, written and won a grant, recruited providers, and launched the first FCC PreK program in Maryland. That pilot became ASPIRE PreK.

Since that first award, FCCAMD has successfully competed for and been awarded a PreK Expansion Grant each year since FY 2020.

What ASPIRE Is

ASPIRE PreK is a statewide coaching and support program that helps FCC educators transition from a business focused on custodial care to one delivering a high-quality PreK program. It is modeled after the induction support required for Maryland public school teachers and built on a research-informed coaching framework developed with Child Trends, a national research organization.

Core program elements include:

- **Instructional Coaching:** Each educator is assigned a dedicated instructional coach. In year one, the coach visits weekly, either in person or virtually. Visits move to every two weeks in year two and every three weeks in year three.
- **Curriculum and Assessment Tools:** Every ASPIRE educator receives the Creative Curriculum, Teaching Strategies Gold, and Brightwheel child care management software at no cost.
- **Umbrella Grant Management:** FCCAMD serves as the primary grantee with MSDE, removing the complex administrative burden of grant management from sole proprietors and creating a single point of contact for MSDE and each LEA.

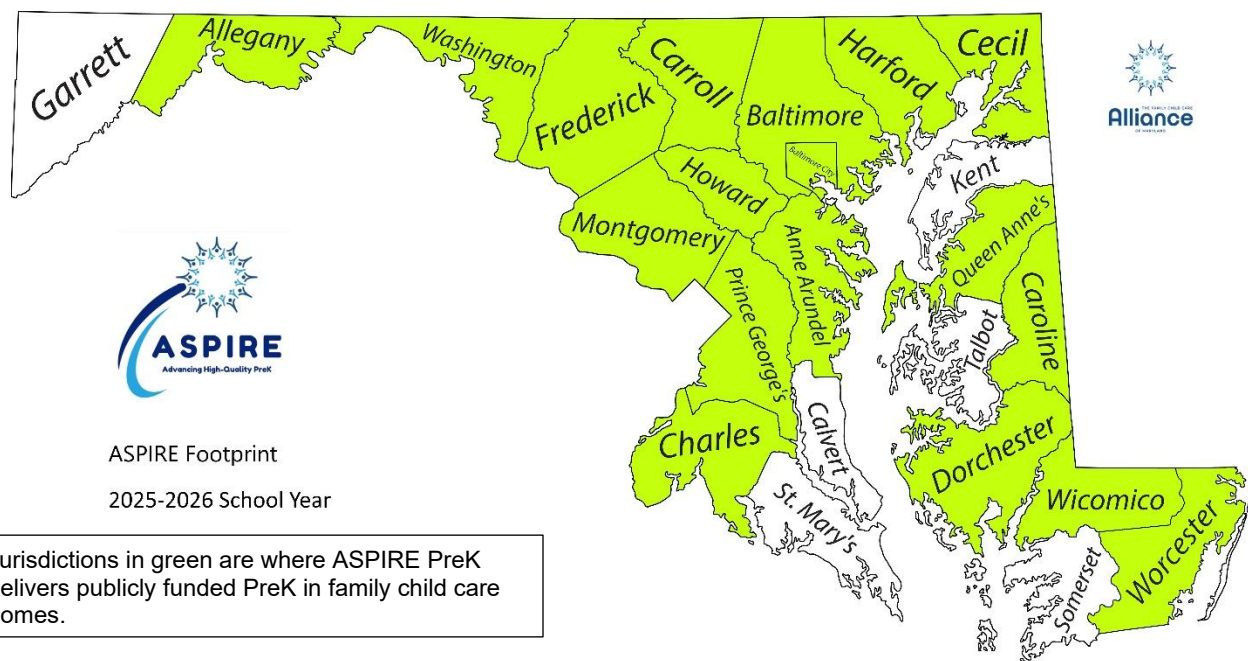
- **Community of Practice:** Educators who complete the three-year program join a professional community that provides the collegial network that FCC providers, who often work in isolation, otherwise lack entirely.
- **Performance Benchmarks:** ASPIRE replicates the accountability structures found in public schools, with clear program benchmarks aligned to state PreK standards.

Growth and Scale

Maryland has moved from zero FCC providers in publicly funded PreK in FY 2020 to 101 today. Over 95% of those programs are in ASPIRE. Programs are operating in 17 counties and Baltimore City.

Sustained growth depends on a standing entry pathway for new FCC educators to participate in publicly funded PreK. Without HB 748, the pathway effectively becomes BA-only for new entrants over time, shrinking the pool of potential new FCC participants.

The program has been independently evaluated by the Johns Hopkins School of Education. (evaluation available upon request) In partnership with a Johns Hopkins team, FCCAMD developed Maryland's first registered FCC apprenticeship with the Maryland Department of Labor, which attracted the attention of the Early Childhood Workforce Connector, a U.S. Department of Labor intermediary.



Who ASPIRE Educators Are

ASPIRE educators are predominantly women of color, mid-career professionals in their 40s and 50s who have dedicated years to serving young children. Most are sole proprietors operating

home-based programs, typically working more than 60 hours per week. These programs often serve children in some of Maryland's highest-need communities.

Their experience in early childhood is substantial. What ASPIRE provides is the structured support, resources, and professional community that public school teachers already have as a matter of course.

"I want to express my genuine appreciation for the support that ASPIRE has provided. It has truly become an invaluable resource that I didn't realize I needed, and now I would be lost without it."

"My gratitude that because of ASPIRE and my coach, I am a better educator, have a more qualified program, and am better meeting the needs of children and families."

Looking Ahead

FCCAMD's goals include expanding to over 500 ASPIRE programs with more than 3,000 publicly funded PreK seats by 2031. The long-term goal is 1,000 programs and over 6,000 seats. Building the operational infrastructure to support FCC educators at the same level public school teachers are supported today is central to this vision.

For more information: Bill Hudson, Executive Director, bill.hudson@fccamd.org