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WOMEN LEGISLATORS OF MARYLAND
THE MARYLAND GENERAL ASSEMBLY

2/18/2026

To: Delegate Jheanelle K. Wilkins, Chair

Delegate Jessica Feldmark, Vice Chair

Ways and Means Committee

The Maryland Women's Caucus is proud to express its support for **HB 659 – Board of Education Membership – Early Childhood Development Professional**.

HB 659 requires that the Maryland State Board of Education include an **early childhood development professional** with substantial experience in child care operations and educational curricula. This individual's qualifications would be verified by the Office of Child Care Advisory Council. By formally incorporating early childhood expertise into the State Board, this legislation elevates the voices of professionals who serve Maryland's youngest learners and underscores the critical role early childhood development plays in long-term educational outcomes.

Early childhood development professionals bring specialized knowledge in developmental milestones, child psychology, family engagement, and evidence-based strategies that support children's cognitive, social, and physical growth. Their training equips them to identify the needs of young children and to understand how early experiences directly influence learning, behavior, and overall well-being.

These professionals also possess expertise in foundational literacy, numeracy, and critical thinking skills, all of which are essential to preparing children for academic success and lifelong learning. Including this perspective on the State Board would strengthen policymaking by ensuring that decisions affecting Maryland's education system are informed by those with direct experience supporting early learning and development.

HB 659 is particularly important given Maryland's ongoing literacy challenges. The State continues to grapple with learning loss exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, ineffective instructional practices, social and economic disparities, and increased screen time among children. Addressing these issues requires early intervention and informed decision-making grounded in early childhood expertise. Ensuring that such expertise is represented at the highest level of educational governance is a critical step toward improving outcomes for Maryland students.

For these reasons, the Maryland Women's Caucus respectfully urges a **favorable report** on HB 659.