

Early Childhood Care & Learning Priorities Agenda

Jan 2018

Adopted by the MD State Child Care Association, Organization of Child Care Directors of Montgomery Co, the MD State Family Child Care Association, Family Child Care Association of Montgomery Co, & the Montgomery Co Chapter of MSCCA

- 1) **Significantly greater public support/investment is needed to expand access to quality, affordable child care.** It's not a handout or additional social services burden. Child care affords parents the opportunity to work and contribute to the current economy and ensures children can be in the quality learning environments they need for proper brain development. Access to quality, affordable child care leads to better outcomes for children, reduced need for remedial and other services, and higher contributions to the future economy. Nobel Prize winning economist James Heckman's latest research released in 2017 showed a return on investment of \$6.40 for each dollar that is spent supporting child care *starting at birth*. It's a return of 13% each year that the investment is made.
- 2) **Public support/investment needs to go to parents through a system of refundable tax credits and child care subsidies.** This is the most equitable and efficient way to expand access to child care as such a system provides more help to those families who most need it and assists parents to afford child care no matter how old their children are (rather than only helping 4 year old children through universal pre-k). Tax credits and subsidies can support infant/toddler care, preschool, centers, family providers, before and after school providers. Implementation will not create more bureaucracy or come with strings attached where costs outweigh the increases in funding (as has happened with some of the universal pre-k pilots). It allows parent choice to ensure a family's actual child care needs are met.
- 3) **As funding increases, providers can raise teacher pay, improve the workforce, and reach higher and higher levels of quality, but this will require tuition rates at the true cost of care.** The biggest subsidy in child care is low pay to child care professionals. Providers cannot make child care cheaper as we cannot operate with less staff. We need to increase pay to develop our workforce and attract and retain quality teachers. We must recognize that higher education and other requirements on teachers translate to significantly higher costs and are not realistic any time soon when and we already have teacher shortages.
- 4) **Unfunded mandates need to stop** as they increase provider costs, reduce the supply of qualified child care professionals, and drive up tuition prices. Each year, more parents cannot afford child care which causes more demand for unlicensed care. MSDE and other regulatory and legislative entities need to stop implementing onerous requirements (pre-service training, etc.) without providing more funding and resources.
- 5) **Universal Pre-K and Pre-K Expansion needs to use a diverse delivery system that is a true partnership with private providers and considers the impact on our entire system of birth to five child care and early education.** Private child care and early education programs for birth to five children consistently perform as well or better on measures of kindergarten readiness and long-term school success. Private programs will not be economically sustainable without four year old children and this will hurt families as costs for infant through three year old children would significantly increase. To be successful, a pre-k system must support and recognize the value of programs in a diversity of formats such as family child care, center based care, nursery schools, Montessori schools, religious schools, co-ops, as well as part time and half day programs. Such programs need the independence to ensure economic sustainability and to innovate and serve families in their unique ways.

2018 Bills

(Note: The Child Care Provider Associations listed on the Priorities Agenda have not yet taken formal positions on all of these bills. Listed below are recommended positions.)

Support (All consistent with Priority 2 of our Priorities Agenda):

Budget bills with additional funding for subsidies and tax credits

SB379/HB430 Child Care Subsidy Bill – Despite being one of the wealthiest states. Maryland provides some of the lowest child care subsidies in the Country. This bill would get us moving in the right direction.

SB422/HB519 Tax Credit Bill – In addition to subsidies, tax credits help families afford child care. Our income qualification levels and credit amount have fallen way behind. This bill is a great first step.

HB68 – Tax Credits for employers who construct child care or subsidize it for employees. Encouraging more employers to offer subsidies for their employees would be great. We would have a concern that the credits for building more child care could negatively impact existing providers in some areas.

Support if Amended (Consistent with Priority 2)

HB 10 – Change so unused lottery funds go to increase child care subsidy award amounts and increase income qualification levels. We first need to bring our child care subsidy reimbursement rates up to the federally recommended 80th percentile before we start diverting funds to pre-k which only helps families for 1 year.

Opposed

HB57 Green Cleaning Bill (In conflict with Priority 4) – For the 3rd straight year, both the child care provider associations and the American Academy of Pediatrics opposed this bill. It would discourage the use of bleach which is the recommended standard of care in child care environments where clean up of fecal matter and bodily fluids is a normal and regular occurrence. Green cleaning products are already allowed but they should not be required as the only option. This bill also has a training requirement which increases the cost of child care.

HB228 Definition of Child Care (Possibly in conflict with Priorities 1, 3 and 4) – This bill would restrict the definition of child care so more unlicensed options would be allowed. This means more adults without background checks having access to children. It also threatens the economic sustainability of after school child care. Child safety needs to take priority over cheap after school care options.

Concerned (Possibly in conflict with Priority 4)

HB 84 Flame Retardant Chemicals in Child Care – same sponsor as HB 57 and we need more information about what is being banned. Is it the same overreach as the Green Cleaning bill? What does the American Academy of Pediatrics say?