

March 30, 2021

**Testimony Concerning HB 1307:
Education – Child Care Centers and Youth Development Organizations and Programs**

Submitted to the Senate Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee

I am writing to you today on behalf of *(insert name of the program and location/city in the county)*. Please oppose HB 1307.

Insert some things about you/your program, for instance:

- That you are licensed
- If you are in EXCELS or not in EXCELS
- Your licensed capacity and how many children are enrolled now
- If you have staff, how many you would have ordinarily and how many you have now

A child care license is not just a piece of paper. It means a provider meets basic standards for health and safety; it means expectations of training and qualifications; it means this is a profession. Licensure is part of Maryland's efforts at expanding access to quality child care, not something to hide from.

Every day that hard work is undermined when we allow unlicensed providers to carry out services. Now there is legislation to weaken Maryland's strong position on this issue. HB 1307 would create an exemption for certain program providers as "emergency" legislation. This is not the emergency that needs attention.

We should not be in the business of creating a loophole for someone to operate without a license. The public health crisis and economic crisis have presented enormous challenges, but this is not the time to roll back the full approach to licensing in Maryland. We must insist on access to affordable, reliable, licensed child care in all of our diverse child care settings in Maryland.

Here are some things we heard from area child care providers. Please borrow from any of these as you add your own thoughts to this testimony:

- "Parents think these unlicensed programs they are legit, licensed."
- "What happened to the "who is watching your child?" campaign?"
- "Until there is enforcement of illegal child care, what motivates these people to stop?"
- "I'm confused. I have to comply with licensure."
- "Why are we here? We've been over this."
- "It just opens the door for more people to bypass licensure."

Why is licensed care important? It's important because it means that the program and providers:

- meet the state's requirements for health and safety in the program's operations
- are trained in appropriate supervision and accountability practices
- follow health practices
- have sufficient numbers of adults to supervise based on the number of children in the program
- are regularly monitored
- are adhering to *one* system in Maryland for parents to navigate

Even as amended in the House, the bill still has serious and potentially dangerous shortcomings with regard to background checks. Checks may still be conducted with outside organizations' protocols, not according to Maryland standards. Child Protective Services checks, an important second layer of vetting, may be omitted.

The bill as amended pulls from disparate sections of COMAR in an attempt to micro-manage regulations through statute in a way that will only apply during unusual circumstances. All parties, including the bill's proponents, would be better served by a comprehensive review and revision of the regulations as they pertain to school-age child care.

Families are doing their best, choosing from among what they can afford with too often too little support. School-age child care – whether it is before or after school, in the summer months, or supporting virtual learning - requires and deserves appropriate safety and health practices too. We believe that all programs responsible for the well-being and safety of children should be licensed, adhere to basic safety and health standards, and receive the support of monitoring, assistance and resources from MSDE.

The pandemic crisis and the economic crisis have created enormous challenges for child care programs.

- As of February 7, 2021, according to MSDE data, 181 licensed programs in Prince George's have not yet re-opened.
- As of February 5, 2021, according to MSDE data, 898 licensed centers and family child care homes across the state are not yet open and operating.
- While a majority of licensed settings are open, they face deep challenges of under-enrollment and the pressures of their operating budgets as parent demand is so varied. The economic impact on child care has been devastating. We must stabilize the child care sector and the well-being of people who work in child care.

These challenges are not solved by exempting some child care settings from licensure.

If any child care programs are struggling with licensing, they need support, not an exemption.

The approach of this bill also fails to prioritize the use of unfilled capacity in licensed programs. This is especially important at time of drastically reduced child care enrollment. Licensed programs have already been vetted and inspected, and their staffs have undergone background checks and training according to Maryland's standards. It does not make sense to create exemptions to those standards when so many licensed programs could serve more school age children.

HB 1307 is not an emergency bill. This is not the emergency. We have an opportunity to address the child care crisis through federal investment, General Assembly leadership, and MSDE action.

Please oppose HB 1307. Please contact me if you have any questions or would like to talk about ideas for supporting child care in Maryland.

Sincerely,

Be sure to include your name, program name, and contact information.

