**February 19, 2024**

**Testimony Concerning the State FY 2025 Budget for the**

**Maryland State Department of Education—Division of Early Childhood Development**

**Submitted to the House Appropriations Committee’s**

**Education and Economic Development Subcommittee**

**Your first and last name**

**The name of your child care program or organization**

**Address of your child care program or organization**

**Phone number to reach you**

**Email address to reach you**

I urge you to protect and invest in the Child Care Scholarship (CCS) Program budget, and to help us make it into the best system that is effective for families, providers, and communities. Our state’s approaches to the child care system have moved forward thanks to your leadership in the General Assembly. We cannot move backward now. There is more to do, and we can do it together.

**Together with partners across the state, we are urging Maryland legislators to:**

* Protect the CCSP budget,
* Remain committed to recent policy progress - expanded family eligibility, waived family copays and increased payment rates to child care providers, and
* Work with the field of early care and education leaders to ensure a strong and effective system of CCSP policies and practices.

**Specifically, I urge you and your colleagues on the Education and Economic Development Subcommittee to:**

* support the Governor’s child care allocation,
* sustain investments in the CCS budget,
* maintain current provider reimbursement levels, and
* oppose the BRFA provision that would enable the administration to impose an enrollment freeze without input from the General Assembly. We urge you to reject the BRFA language enabling the Administration to implement a freeze in Program enrollment.

One theoretical “cost saving” change would be a return to required co-payments from families. The amount the state would collect in returning to the policy and practice of CCSP co-pays does not at all relieve the budget deficit. The hardship placed on families and providers should give you pause:

* providers would be responsible for tracking down the co-pays from families.
* the Scholarship amount does not always cover the full cost of care. Families are already asked to pay the difference. A co-pay would be in addition to any differential.
* proposed co-payment amounts would have a significant impact on family budgets.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation reports that in Maryland, nearly 12 percent of children younger than 5 live in families that during a recent year saw someone quit, change, or refuse a job because of problems with child care, and women are much more likely than men to experience negative employment consequences related to caregiving. Maryland’s Comptroller issued a report noting as the cost of child care increases, overall female employment decreases by 5%.

So many more families can access high quality care through access to CCS that they would otherwise not be able to. We cannot turn away these families, but that is what would happen if we do not invest in and strengthen CCS. [Idea: Add in a few sentences to tell a story you are experiencing about a family counting on you, how CCS helps them be a part of your program, or what would happen if CCS was taken from them]

At the same time, we also must ensure that being a part of the child care workforce is something Marylanders want to and can afford to be. This includes being able to take care of ourselves and our own families as we take care of our community’s children. We must strengthen the state’s approach to CCS payments and available wage bonus payments. This matters to families, too. Please work with the field of early care and education leaders [like me] to ensure we have a strong and effective system of CCS policies and practices.

We are a part of the fabric of our communities - necessary so that parents can confidently go to work and children are in safe, nurturing learning environments. Families are counting on us, employers are counting on us, and we are all counting on your support.

Please protect, invest in, and continue to improve Child Care Scholarship in Maryland.