



**Caring For Maryland's Most
Important Natural Resource™**

Maryland State Child Care Association

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The Maryland State Child Care Association (MSCCA) is a non-profit, statewide, professional association incorporated in 1984 to promote the growth and development of child care and learning centers in Maryland. MSCCA has over 4500 members working in the field of early childhood. We believe children are our most important natural resources and work hard to advocate for children, families and for professionalism within the early childhood community.

February 11, 2021

Position: Supports

SB 597

Education, Health and Environmental Affairs

Thanks to Chairs and the esteemed members of the Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee for the opportunity to share testimony.

Maryland State Child Care Association (MSCCA) fully and enthusiastically supports SB 436. MSCCA is grateful for Senator King's leadership, as well as advocacy in the area of child care. She is a true champion for children and families in Maryland.

Nationally there is a critical workforce shortage in child care which leads to insufficient access for parents to much needed child care programs. Maryland is also experiencing the workforce shortage in this critical need area. The COVID 19 pandemic has impacted the child care workforce as the risk of exposure has been too great for some teachers, therefore causing even more shortages in the field. Critical workforce shortages impact parent's access to child care.

Insufficient child care negatively impacts not only parents, but employers, and taxpayers when families do not have the child care they need, parents' work productivity falls, resulting in costs to parents, their employers, and, ultimately, taxpayers. Insufficient child care also leads to increases in illegal, unlicensed child care which result in poor outcomes for children. Covid 19 crisis has disproportionately fallen on the shoulders of women in the workforce due to the pandemic and child care related issues and has forced even more women to alter their work schedules due therefore possibly impacting their careers.

MSCCA is concerned for children and families as the child care/early childhood workforce is in crisis. Our members have shared frustration and fear as the pool of viable candidates that are qualified as child care teachers in Maryland continues to decline and the timeline for hiring approval process is problematic. Surveys from our 147 member programs provided additional data from February 2020 that supports the need to find ways to allow businesses to efficiently hire quality child care teachers and expand, not decrease or lessen, qualifications while maintaining the integrity of the current COMAR licensing regulations. MSCCA believes SB 436 creates a way to increase accessibility to quality programs while alleviating some barriers for child care businesses/programs.

SB 436 would establish probationary qualifications for Child Care Teachers in Preschool Centers and School Age Child Care Centers allowing an individual who holds a degree in early childhood education or **specified related fields of study** to qualify as a child care teacher if the individual is enrolled in the 90 hour approved preservice training and successfully completes within 6 months or less after being hired. MSDE would still receive all hiring information, including fingerprinting, medical, orientation, the college requirements addressed in this legislation and the proof of enrollment in an approved MSDE 90- hour certification training. The small, but important distinction will positively impact the ability of a program to hire quality teachers efficiently. Currently there is no timeframe for approval through Professional Qualification Evaluations from Office of Child Care. The changes would alleviate some of the need for Office of Child Care variances and would create a better pathway to expedient qualification process. SB 436 would also increase access for families to child care because delays in approval of qualifications to hire staff sometimes results in classrooms remaining closed, potential candidates moving onto other opportunities and confusion in the hiring process. The training becomes meaningful as the degreed teacher is engaged with the children. COMAR currently only requires the pre-service requirements (along with fingerprints, medical, orientation, ADA training) the teacher to be 19 years old, have completed the 90-hours (two weeks of training) or at least the first 45 hours of the approved training and request a variance for the remaining 45 hours. This bill raises the bar and a college graduate should be able to successfully complete the 90 hours efficiently while working in the classroom with a degree in a related field already referenced in COMAR.

Along with requirements for extensive criminal background checks, child care teachers also must complete a medical evaluation, staff orientation and Americans with Disabilities Act training before beginning employment. Currently Child Care Teachers in Preschool (COMAR staff qualifications are the same for ages two through four years) and School Age Child Care Centers and are not required to hold degrees, only be 19 years of age and complete the first 45 of the 90 hour approved certification training. COMAR currently only requires the pre-service requirements (along with fingerprints, medical, orientation, ADA training) This

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We hope the Committee recognizes SB 436 is a way to address some obstacles in qualification process by ensuring a probationary period, with accountability measures while continuing to elevate the profession. MSDE will still receive all the paperwork required including the degree info and the program will be required to submit the staff successful completion for licensing to upload into their system, as they already do continually for staff changes for positions, continued training requirements, etc.

Another significant consideration is the alignment and relationship SB 436 and expansion of prekindergarten. This bill helps career changers and those entering the field to establish the steps to meet with the Kirwan Commission recommendations/Blueprint for Maryland's Education legislation related to Prekindergarten teacher qualifications as the six months to complete the training allows for time to pursue at the college level for credit.

Finally, MSCCA's goal is to be sure children and families have access to choices for quality child care programs first and then we address the real concerns related to workforce shortages, alleviate barriers, expand qualifications and competencies in a probationary manner, build capacity for qualified workforce and encourage career changers to enter into early childhood field, as it is a national and state area of critical need. SB 436 is a step in the right direction to reach these goals.

MSCCA urges a favorable report.