



Maryland Association for the Education of Young Children

Testimony in Support of HB 776
**“State Department of Education – Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health
Consultation Project – Study and Report”**
Submitted to the Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee
March 23, 2021

Position: Favorable

The Maryland Association for the Education of Young Children (MDAEYC) supports HB 776, which would allow MSDE to conduct a thorough review and study the Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH) Consultation Project.

MDAEYC is a professional association of 1,500 early childhood educators, allied professionals, and families. We promote high-quality early learning for all children, birth through age 8, by connecting early childhood education practice, policy, and research. We advance a diverse, dynamic early childhood profession and support all who care for, educate, and work on behalf of young children. Many of our members are educators working in child care centers or family child care homes.

Science tells us that the foundations of sound mental health are built early in life. Early experiences—including children’s relationships with parents, caregivers, relatives, teachers, and peers—interact with genes to shape the architecture of the developing brain. Disruptions in this developmental process can impair a child’s capacities for learning and relating to others, with lifelong implications.¹ The IECMH Consultation project works to bring awareness to this important issue and provide support to young children and their caregivers.

We have all experienced an extended period of crisis this past year of the COVID-19 pandemic, with emotional and mental stress at an all time high. Now more than ever greater attention needs to be paid to the mental health of our youngest children in these trying times and the ways in which we can better support healthy infant and early childhood mental development. As we begin to welcome families and children back into our care we must be as intentional about addressing their mental well-being as we are their physical safety. This is why we strongly urge you to support a strong beginning for all Maryland’s children by supporting HB 776, which would allow MSDE

¹ National Scientific Council on the Developing Child. (2012). *Establishing a level foundation for life: Mental health begins in early childhood*. Harvard University, Center on the Developing Child.



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to further investigate and expand upon existing investments in infant and early childhood mental health.

If you have any questions, please contact: Christina Lopez, President, at christina.lopez@mdaeyc.org or 301-751-1626.