



SEEING ABILITIES NOT DISABILITIES.

Testimony Concerning HB 776

“State Department of Education - Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Project - Study and Report”

Submitted to the Senate Education, Health and Environmental Affairs
Committee

March 22, 2021

Position: Favorable

Abilities Network is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that assists individuals with disabilities in Maryland to achieve their personal goals and reach their maximum potential. Project ACT has been a leading support in the Maryland early learning community for 23 years. We support HB 776.

The Child Resource Center of Baltimore/Harford/Cecil Counties at Abilities Network/Project All Children Together (ACT) provides Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (IECMHC) services to Baltimore, Harford and Cecil Counties.

Of the children whose caregivers receive IECMH services from Project ACT, **approximately 92% are retained in care**. This service provides invaluable support that prevents suspension and expulsion, keeping parents working and their children learning. *“[The consultant] has been hugely helpful to our family. She has supported our child - acted as an advocate for our family and gone above and beyond,”* according to one Baltimore County Parent.

A multi-disciplinary model is key to our success. Project ACT utilizes a multi-disciplinary team that includes social workers, special educators, behaviorists, and early childhood educators. Referrals are often made for children who are reacting to developmentally inappropriate practices, who have unidentified development delays, or who have experienced trauma. Approximately 20% of children who receive IECMHC services have an IFSP or IEP upon referral, but receive no special education support services in the child care setting. With a multi-disciplinary team of professionals, we are able to leverage our expertise to support this wide variety of needs. The 2020 Maryland IECMHC Project Standards from MSDE have been revised to align with national standards, increasing the required staff qualifications to include a licensed clinician, and adding additional requirements for ongoing staff support. This is a valuable addition to the service model. However, a sufficient increase in funding to achieve these goals did not accompany the FY21 grants.

Current funding serves only .2% of the childcare population in our jurisdictions, when data shows that 1-5% of the population may be in need of support. The National Pyramid Model estimates that between 1-5% of children in care will require intensive individual support through services such as IECMHC. Project ACT is funded to provide this service to approximately .2% of the

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Project ACT is only able to accept an average of 62% of referrals, and funds are typically exhausted by the third quarter. Over the past five years, Project ACT has been able to serve only 62% of the children who were referred for IECMHC services on average and demand continues to rise. From FY17-FY19, referrals increased by 23%. Most years, Project ACT is unable to accept new referrals by the end of the third quarter of the grant term. Regrettably, many children placed on a waiting list for this service are expelled from their childcare programs.

Wait time for service can be as long as 8 weeks. Wait time for a consultant to become available can reach from 4-8 weeks during heavy referral periods. During this time, children may be suspended or expelled from their programs, and teachers reach burn out points from lack of support. *“At the start of the school year I had a class that had a huge variety of difficulties. I lost control of my classroom. However with step by step help from [the IECMHC consultant] I was able to gain control again. [The consultant] not only helped with [the identified child] but also helped with all other children,”* said one Harford County Early Childhood Provider.

This bill offers an opportunity for the State to examine the feasibility of expanding IECMHC services and providing these vital services to more young children. We respectfully urge the Committee’s favorable consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Morgan Durand Horvath".

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