

March 3, 2021

HB 1703 –Support Youth Development for School-Age Children Act – SUPPORT

Dear Chair Kaiser, Vice Chair Washington, and Members of the Ways & Means Committee;

The Maryland Out of School Time Network (MOST) is a statewide organization dedicated to closing opportunity gaps by expanding both the quantity and quality of afterschool and summer learning opportunities for school-aged young people. MOST is one of the fifty statewide networks supported by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation and serves as Maryland's affiliate to the National Afterschool Association.

MOST strongly supports HB1703 as a necessary measure to remove barriers for trusted youth development program providers to provide safe and supportive spaces for school-aged youth in Maryland. Even before the pandemic, Maryland languished for years in the bottom 10 states for access to afterschool programs while demand has continued to rise.

From 2014 to 2020 the percentage of young people who would attend an afterschool program if one were available to them rose from 36 to 48% (that's 389,983 kids). One of the biggest barriers is cost—59% of Maryland parents say that afterschool programs are too expensive. Demand for afterschool is highest among families of color who are more likely to report that enough opportunities are not available in their communities and that programs are unaffordable.

With school closures, there is a new urgency to provide alternative places and spaces for young people whose caregivers are still required to work either in or out of the home and cannot successfully supervise virtual learning, and to provide options for students who remain disconnected from the internet. **Youth development organizations have stepped up to the plate and many more would be willing to do so if allowed.**

The Boys & Girls Clubs and Y's both participated in the Essential Personnel School Age childcare program. That initiative recognized that waivers of specific provisions of the licensing regulations were both reasonable and necessary to set up sites quickly. When that program ended in July, programs that continued to offer safe and supportive spaces and were rewarded with cease-and-desist orders. The Maryland State Department of Education, based on their interpretation of the childcare regulations ordered that all programs operating learning hubs during the school day must be licensed and have further indicated that believe their mandate is to license all afterschool programs operating in public schools, suggesting that additional enforcement can be anticipated going forward.

The Y, Boys & Girls Clubs, Municipal and County Recreation & Parks Programs, and the Local Management Board funded afterschool programs all have their own systems of accountability including quality and safety standards and staff professional development and training. Public schools are entrusted with the education and safety of children during school hours and are competent to make

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decisions on opportunities offered in their buildings after 3 p.m. Overlaying the school-age childcare licensing regulations as currently written, on top of their individualized requirements, is not just onerous, it will greatly decrease the number and quality of safe spaces for young people to go when school is no open.

The programs are free or low-cost, funded largely by public or foundation dollars, not parent fees. They serve different populations of young people than are currently served by licensed childcare programs and provide options to families that cannot afford the fee for service childcare programs (even with the subsidy in some cases). And while they provide supervised spaces, the goals and philosophy are not about custodial care. Youth development focuses on building social and emotional skills, promoting positive relationships with peers and adults, and promoting self-efficacy through youth voice and choice.

Thirty-six states provide one or more of the proposed exemptions in their childcare regulations. The Maryland State Department of Education will claim that our state's childcare regulations are the model for the country-- and that may be true for 0-5--however, there is a strong consensus that our school-age regulations are developmentally inappropriate and make demands on providers that make operating school-aged childcare programs unnecessarily difficult without improving program quality.

This legislation provides a greater level of accountability than currently exists in practice. Many programs do not apply for childcare licenses, not because they are evading accountability, but because they do not see themselves in the regulations. We do not want programs that have no oversight and are not following the best practices around safety to hide in the shadows. The requirement to register and provide evidence of basic safety standards and their good standing relationship with another regulatory entity will create a higher standard and greater awareness about programs operating around the state.

MOST has participated in efforts in the past to improve the school-age regulations which resulted in no substantial changes. We understand new conversations are emerging about school-age regulation reform and we look forward to participating in those dialogues. When the school-age regulations are overhauled and replaced with regulations that are more reasonable, like the requirements for summer camp licenses, we would be happy to revisit the need for these exemptions. It is hard to know what is going to happen next, even as schools reopen virtual and hybrid learning models may be with us for some time and young people need the support of youth development focused organizations now more than ever. In the absence of a more coherent school-age regulatory model, exemptions will provide credible and dependable program providers the flexibility they need to support young people and their families. For these reasons, we urge you to provide a favorable report for this emergency legislation.

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