



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

ARIANA KELLY
Legislative District 16
Montgomery County

DEPUTY MAJORITY WHIP

Health and Government
Operations Committee

Subcommittees

Chair, Health Occupations
and Long Term Care

Insurance and Pharmaceuticals

House Chair, Joint Committee on
Children, Youth, and Families

**HB 597- Child Care Centers
Teacher Qualifications
February 3, 2021**

Chair Kaiser, Vice-Chair Washington, Members of the Committee,

I am here today to present HB 597, which is identical to a bill that passed out of this Committee last year by a vote of 21-0. With the abrupt end of session last year, the bill passed on the House floor but never passed the Senate, so we are back this year to hopefully get it over the finish line.

The importance of childcare to families and businesses was immediately apparent during the early days of the pandemic. Our essential workers needed childcare, and closed schools meant school-age children needed care while parents tried to work. It was a harsh reminder that our entire economy depends on the availability of a strong childcare network.

I'm sure you've heard many stories of families forced to make very difficult choices as they sought to find care for their children when child care centers and schools were shut down. Parents (mostly women) were forced to quit their jobs or reduce work hours to care for their children. The long term financial implications of this reality will be felt for decades.

The impact of COVID on our childcare network has been equally devastating. Increased operational costs and reduced capacities have crushed businesses that already operated on razor-thin margins. Tomorrow, you will be considering legislation that will provide direct financial support to childcare centers. The bill we will discuss today is a small step that will offer relief on another critical issue faced by childcare centers: staffing shortages.

HB 597 allows child care centers to hire lead teachers who have a bachelors or associates degree in early childhood or a related field such as elementary education, child development, home economics, nursing, social work, or special education to be placed in a classroom without waiting for qualification approval from the Maryland Department of Education. It also allows a candidate to be hired with a degree in an unrelated field if they have the first 45 hours of the

90-hour child care certification requirement without the need to obtain a variance from MSDE. The bill stipulates that the second 45 hours must be completed within six months. In both scenarios, appropriate background and safety checks, orientation, and pre-service training are all still required.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, job openings for preschool teachers will grow by 10% by 2026 and yet many child care centers struggle now to fill vacancies. Vacant job openings hinder center expansion and can even lead to the closure of existing classrooms, creating additional barriers to critical childcare access for working families. Child care centers can benefit from the ability to hire probationary employees who meet specified requirements. It is our job to facilitate growth within this industry and encourage the hiring of additional childcare providers, to create numerous new job opportunities and greater economic stability during the Covid-19 pandemic.

This is an area where we MUST have high standards for safety and quality. But we also MUST provide career ladders and incentives to draw people into the workforce. HB 597 expands the potential qualifications for lead teachers and thus expands the pool of potential applicants - a move that childcare center directors overwhelmingly believe will have a positive impact on their ability to staff their centers.

This is a practical, small change we can make to support these vital child care businesses and their potential workforce without risking the quality of care provided.

I urge a favorable report on HB 597. Thank you.