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February 3, 2021

Supporting HB0597

Ways and Means Committee

Good Afternoon, esteemed members of the Ways and Means Committee. Thank you to Delegate Ariana Kelly for sponsoring this legislation and the distinguished members of this committee for allowing me this time for testimony.

I am the CEO/COO of Play Centers, Inc., which has been providing early care and education to more than 1,000 children attending our five preschool programs and 10 school-age programs located in Anne Arundel County, Baltimore City, and Baltimore County. Prior to the impact of COVID-19, we employed approximately 200 teachers and support team members.

We are in strong support of House Bill 597 because it helps to address the ongoing critical child care workforce shortages that have become even more precarious in the recent year and it does so in a way that continues to ensure high quality child care and education for Maryland's children, provided by committed, qualified, and educated teachers.

This legislation still clearly aligns with current COMAR for Child Care staff qualifications and will support Maryland families and children in the following ways:

- Provides relief through widening the workforce pool to include child care providers and teachers who come to the field through a diverse variety of college majors, to ensure that each classroom is staffed with qualified and committed candidates;
- Decreases the negative impact of teacher shortages on children and families, impacting school readiness and social-emotional well-being;
- Supports the continued health of child care businesses of all sizes by allowing for greater numbers of quality teachers to be available as classrooms continue to reopen at an even more rapid pace, in response to rapidly increasing return to school and return to work plans.

Play Centers, Inc. fully supports HB0597 and respectfully requests that you vote in favor of this bill.

Thank you.

Diana E. Mellott
CEO/COO
Play Centers, Inc.

2414 East Joppa Road
Parkville, MD 21234-2926

Phone
410.296.4880

Fax
410.296.0803

Website
www.playcenters.org

E-mail
playcenters@playcenters.org

Tax ID
52-1259566