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February 3, 2021

**Supporting HB0608**

**Ways and Means Committee**

Good afternoon, esteemed members of the Ways and Means Committee. Thank you to Delegate Solomon 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 for families in Anne Arundel County, Baltimore City, and Baltimore County since 1982. In that time, we have grown to employing more than 200 teachers and support team members who provide nurturing and enriching environments for children, preparing them for school and for the future.

The impact of COVID-19 has been unprecedented and barely survivable.

- From March 2020 to the present we experienced an enrollment decrease of 99.9% of our school-age children, from 900 down to 6.
- From March 2020 to recent months, we experienced an enrollment decrease of 90% of our preschool families.
- For 3 months, 3 of our 5 preschool locations were completely closed.
- Our preschool programs have recovered to just over 40% capacity, a welcome number compared to a late March number of 16 children across 5 programs, but even that degree of recovery has been alarmingly slow.
- Our school-age programs have not even begun the recovery process, as we all await the implementation of a Return to School plan, hopefully on March 1. We are strongly apprehensive that even when on-site school-age care in schools does begin again, school-age program recovery will be alarmingly slow as well.
- We experienced a massive hike in the cost of our Unemployment Insurance Coverage, from approximately \$105,000 annually in 2019 to \$270,000 in 2020. That trend continues at this time.
- Our rent payments in each of our preschool locations (ranging from \$1,200 to \$11,500 per month) has continued without forgiveness or deferment.

We did qualify for the initial PPP monies and those monies, plus the monies that we had stored in our reserve funds, have allowed us to stay in business as we go through this very slow and arduous recovery. Our reserve funds are now fully depleted and very fortunately the second round of PPP monies has provided emergency economic support as we continue to work to become stable and independent as quickly as possible. We have struggled daily to stay the course until families can fully return to work safely and confidently and children of all ages return to care. Other child care programs have not been able to weather this storm and each that closes contributes to a future early care and education critical shortage. Child care providers need and deeply appreciate what the Child Care Provider Support Grant Program offers at this critical time.

***Play Centers, Inc. fully supports HB0608 and respectfully requests that you vote in favor of this bill.***

Thank you.

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