

CEDARCROFT SCHOOL

74 YEARS OF EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION

February 3, 2021

Testimony by Kate Longworth Gentry

Position: Supporting HB 597

Ways and Means Committee

Good Afternoon, my name is Kate Longworth Gentry. I would like to thank Delegate Ariana Kelly for sponsoring this legislation and Chairperson Ann Kaiser, Vice Chairperson Alonso Washington and the distinguished members of this committee for allowing me to testify today. I am the owner/operator of Cedarcroft School, with a capacity for 76 children, located in Baltimore City. Cedarcroft School was founded by Mrs. Edith Gentry in 1947 and has been in continuous operation in the same location, owned and operated by women and primarily employing women throughout our 74-year history.

I joined Cedarcroft School in 2006, after a career in Banking and Insurance with the last 15 years of my corporate career as a senior executive. I have extensive experience in operations and working with regulatory groups. In the past five years, beginning with the "Race to the Top" the speed of change in our business has increased exponentially. Regulatory changes, unfunded mandates, delays in approval of qualified candidates by The Office of Child Care, additional training requirements have been and are challenging, but achievable with extraordinary effort and time. We are now faced with numerous major challenges which are not as easily met. The challenges facing us now are the COVID-19 pandemic, increase in minimum wage, expansion of Universal Pre-K as the legislation related to Kirwan Commission and the severe and worsening workforce shortage.

I am submitting testimony to address some of these challenges, especially the critical workforce shortage. I encourage you to vote yes on HB 597. This will be a major, positive step forward, without any reduction in quality of care or education of young children. Cedarcroft School's starting pay is already above the future targeted minimum wage of \$15.00. We continue to make pay scale adjustments each year to keep our starting pay significantly above the minimum wage. Unfortunately, even our higher than the usual pay scale, has not exempted us from the impact of the severe workforce shortage. The pool of qualified candidates has diminished over the last few years. I have been challenged to find qualified people or more accurately, anyone who even wants to work in Early Childhood Education. As a result, I have had to turn away new families and students due to lack of staffing.

Last year I was able to find 3 individuals to work in the Teacher Aid role. Even though each of these women have college degrees they are not qualified under the current laws and regulations to work as a teacher in Early Childhood Education. This is true, in spite of the reality that currently, a licensed family/ home childcare provider can be qualified by Office of Child Care if they are 18 years of age with no preservice qualifications required except a brief orientation. Licensed Family Child Care providers are not required to have a high school diploma or the 90-hour certificate, yet they have responsibility for the care and education of up to eight children ages infants through school age. The disparity in requirements is astounding. The

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public school system is allowed to hire individuals with Bachelor's degree in unrelated field and allow them to pursue additional state requirements while in the classroom as a teacher. We believe HB 597 will be a step in a positive direction for child care programs/businesses and towards parity in qualifications. This legislation will also help to address the implicit bias in the current regulations and laws, against men and women who have degrees and choose to change careers to work in Early Childhood Education, rather than another field. This implicit bias and disparity in regulation causes additional pressure on the workforce shortage resulting in greater difficulty for parents in finding excellent Early Childhood Education and Care and ultimately higher costs for parents.

Finally, a number of my teachers have come to me over the years seeking a career change. The staff that I've employed as a result of a career change tend to have a long tenure in Early Childhood Education. They truly love what they do. As stated before, this is a second career for me as well. For most of us, the career change is a result of seeking work that feeds our soul first and accept there is a great monetary sacrifice in making the choice to work in Early Childhood Education interacting with and supporting parents and children each day.

I respectfully urge a favorable report.

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