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**Testimony Concerning Support for:
HB 993 Early Childhood Development – Child Care Scholarship Program – Alterations**

We urge your support for legislation to help ensure a thriving child care system in Maryland.

Child care providers across the nation continue to struggle as they recover during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Child care providers are in crisis, and so are families, and Prince George's County is no exception. We were ordered closed by the Governor and reopened before vaccines were available, risking our health. We knew our community needed us. However, enrollment was very low during the past two years because parents were hesitant to return children to group care. Parents are now trying to enroll and there is a staffing crisis that could result in closing classrooms or keeping families on waitlists. Additionally, we had multiple closures due to Covid outbreaks and quarantines. Some parents left because they did not want to pay when they were not receiving service yet we still needed to pay our staff and have revenue for all the other operating expenses.

Greenbelt Children's Center has been licensed since 1990 and accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children since 1999. We have operated a public Prekindergarten classroom for 22 years, in partnership with our local school system. We have achieved and maintained the highest level, Level 5, in the Maryland EXCELS Quality Rating and Improvement System from inception. Our program has always accepted economically disadvantaged families who are eligible for the State Child Care Subsidy/Scholarship program. Currently 20% of our capacity of 60 children, have vouchers that allows access for their children to high quality preschool. When we reopened, we were not able to have all staff return. Almost everyone working here has a compromised health condition. Most returned anyway but some have never returned because they are in ongoing treatments and their immune system puts them at very high risk. We are exhausted from all the extra duties required of us during the pandemic, but we have few resources for substitutes so that our teachers can have respite and take a day off. Burnout is threatening the ones who are present, and I am in fear of losing highly qualified teachers because there are none standing in line to apply.

Additionally, there is a need to improve our facility so that it is safe for children and staff. We need sunshade because we have lost many trees due to climate change. We want to prevent skin cancer of our teachers and children outside. There are plumbing fixtures that need replacement and playground items that are aging and deteriorating that must be improved to remain compliant with licensing and safe for children and staff.

In Prince George's County, area child care providers like me are experiencing deep challenges with funding/finances, staffing and enrollment which are all totally intertwined. The stabilization funds offered in 2021 were an important step. There is more to be done.

We need help rebuilding our businesses and keeping our quality, relationship-based practices strong, so we can be there for working parents and for young children. The quality of child care, and the experience of the birth-to-five years, are crucial to school readiness and supporting working families.

Here are things that could help us:

- Access to a revolving loan fund to make changes to our program's physical spaces, with 5 years to repay
- EXCELS Bonuses for the programs participating in in Maryland's QRIS that can be used for capital improvements.

Please help us to stay open and be here for our community that needs us very much! We must continue to take steps to stabilize the child care sector and the well-being of people who work in child care, and we must also rebuild child care better than before.

Thank you for your leadership for our community. Together we can help child care programs to stay open successfully and offer more choices for families when we make sure that all the pieces and parts of policy ideas come together.

Sincerely,
Flora L Gee, M.Ed.
Director