

Testimony in Favor of SB350 for House Ways and Means Committee
Submitted by Barbara Warman
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My name is Barbara Warman and I am writing to you as a retired Early Childhood Professional to urge you to support passage of SB350. Over my 30+ years working with the National Association for the Education of Young Children, the Head Start Training Consortium, Montgomery County Early Childhood Services, Shepard Pratt Early Head Start and the Montgomery County Commission on Child Care, I learned directly from families, teachers, and researchers about the importance of access to quality and affordable early care and education. All families want the best for their children and yet more and more are unable to afford quality child care that will support their children's healthy development and early education (which is on par with the cost of housing). While research confirms that giving children access to quality early education and care improves their educational achievement and long term outcomes, we also know that families cannot work without child care.

Child care and early childhood education have always been underfunded despite providing a key service for our communities that is in increasing demand. The problem continues to worsen. In fact, since the pandemic Program Directors have struggled to keep their doors open. Those who have stayed open have reduced enrollment without enough teachers and less capacity to meet higher standards. We are at an exciting point in Maryland with the implementation of the Blueprint. Unfortunately, without a stable system of child care, Maryland's plan for expanding access to Pre-K will not be successful. We need strong public-private partnerships to meet the goals and this begins with better rates for child care services provided through the Child Care Scholarship program.

The improvements to the Child Care Scholarship program outlined in this bill provide an excellent opportunity for Maryland to step up and address the urgent need for families and children, as well as for our entire early childhood system. By recognizing that families in need can only access quality child care with increased scholarship rates and higher eligibility standards this is an important bill to pass.

I would also like you to consider that this bill addresses a priority issue of representatives of 38 congregations and schools who are members of Action in Montgomery (AIM). Each year AIM uses grassroots listening sessions to identify community priorities and this year after listening to 1,200 community members, access to affordable quality child care and Pre-K was selected as one of three priorities. I have been involved with AIM as a member of Cedar Lane Unitarian Universalist Congregation. While we have been advocating for this priority with the County Executive and County Council, the policymakers have been reminding us that our child care and early childhood education system depends first on the State of Maryland to provide Child Care Scholarships and other funding and oversight of child care. Please consider these points and do what is best for our children, families and community-pass SB350!