

**House Bill 352**  
**Budget Reconciliation and Financing Act of 2024**  
House Appropriations Committee  
February 28, 2024  
**Support with Amendment**

**Catholic Charities of Baltimore supports the Childcare Scholarship (CCS) program and opposes any cost-cutting measures to restrict access to this vital safety-net for families.** Therefore, we strongly urge the committee to **reject** the BRFA provision that could bring back waitlists for the CCS program, namely the proposed language that references implementing a freeze in enrollment or establishing waitlists.

For over a century, Catholic Charities has provided care and services to improve the lives of Marylanders in need. We accompany Marylanders as they age with dignity, support their pursuit of employment and career advancement, heal from trauma and addiction, achieve economic independence, prepare for educational success, and welcome immigrant neighbors into Maryland communities.

**The CCSP is a critical safety-net program for low-income families.** We work with struggling families every day across central and western Maryland, and the high costs of childcare are a substantial burden for the low-income households we serve. The stories we hear from our clients about the rising costs of childcare mirror what the data shows: across Maryland, childcare ranks as the first, second, or third highest household expense in all jurisdictions in the state.<sup>1</sup> Securing scholarships through the CCSP is often the only way families can access the affordable, quality childcare they need to secure and maintain employment, continue their education, or provide care for other loved ones.

**Your commitment to supporting vulnerable families through this vital program is deeply appreciated.** However, we are deeply troubled by the proposed BRFA language that could pave the way for the Administration to establish waitlists for CCS. This proposed change undermines the vital safeguards established through collaborative efforts of advocates and the Maryland General Assembly in the 2023 CCS legislation. Permitting the Department to unilaterally freeze enrollment (and/or thereby impose waitlists) will severely impact families, restricting their access to this essential safety-net program and potentially disrupting critical childcare arrangements. The detrimental effects of waitlists were evident in 2011, taking seven years for all eligible Maryland families to regain access to the program. The recent enhancements to CCS have led to historic enrollment, benefiting over 32,000 children, and promoting equitable care.<sup>2</sup> Allowing waitlists threatens to undo this progress. While we acknowledge budgetary challenges, we believe that the CCS program should not be targeted for cost-saving measures. The funds allocated to this program are not merely expenses but investments in our children, Maryland families, and the overall economy.

**For these reasons, Catholic Charities urges the committee to strike page 8 line 25 through page 9 line 23 to safeguard access to the Childcare Scholarship program. Your thoughtful consideration of this matter is greatly appreciated.**

Submitted By: Madelin Martinez, Assistant Director of Advocacy

1. Maryland Family Network. 2022. Child Care Demographics.  
<https://www.marylandfamilynetwork.org/sites/default/files/202202/Maryland%202022.pdf>
2. Maryland State Department of Education. 2023. Data – Participation Data Children by County.  
<https://earlychildhood.marylandpublicschools.org/data>