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Testimony Concerning: HB 1314

Title: Corporations and Associations - Annual Reports - Filing Fees 3 (Right to Start Act)

Submitted to: Economic Matters
Date of hearing: March 6, 2024

Position: Support

The Family Child Care Alliance of Maryland (the Alliance) strongly supports the passage of HB 1314.

Between 1996 and 2023, the number of licensed family child care (FCC) homes in Maryland fell from approximately 12,500 to approximately 4,300¹. That represents a closure of over 8,000 small, predominately women-owned businesses. Even more concerning is it represents a loss of over 64,000 spaces for children, largely children aged birth to five, but that number also includes lost spaces for school-aged children in after-school care.

Families across Maryland and the country choose family child care for a wide variety of reasons, including its home-like environment, proximately, cost, small group sizes, the ability to find a program with the same language and culture, evening and weekend care, and the ability to form close relationships with their child's caregiver.

To satisfy the needs of parents and the goals of the Blueprint for a robust mixed-delivery system for PreK, the decline in FCC homes needs to be reversed and quickly. The Growing Family Child Care Opportunities Pilot Program (GOFCC) has proven it is part of the solution to the decline in FCC businesses. In one year, the program helped open 101 new family child care homes, resulting in 796 new spaces for Maryland's children. In addition, the program has "...cut the average length of the licensing process from 12 to five months..."² The funding provided via changes made possible by HB 1314 will enable GOFCC to expand, thereby helping start more of these businesses that are so crucial to our child care system and, increasingly, for the Blueprint.

The Alliance also supports HB 1314 because the GOFCC program has the potential to serve as a feeder network into our ASPIRE PreK program and our newly created ASPIRE Apprenticeship program. Our apprenticeship is the only FCC-specific apprenticeship program registered with Maryland's Department of Labor and one of the few such programs in the nation. The ASPIRE Apprenticeship is designed to give real-world experience and training to those individuals working to open their own FCC business. The GOFCC project helps them get trained and licensed, and the apprenticeship program gives them experience.

Once a FCC provider becomes licensed, achieves an EXCEL rating of Level 3, and obtains a four-year degree, they become eligible to be considered for the ASPIRE PreK program. This program has demonstrated that with the appropriate support, eligible FCC providers can offer high-quality PreK instruction, thereby helping to create the spaces needed to meet the PreK targets of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future. ASPIRE PreK is the only program in the state designed to ensure FCC PreK programs deliver the same quality of instruction expected from public schools. We select eligible FCC providers that want to transition their businesses from a child care business to a high-quality PreK program, as defined by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE).

Our providers then go through an intensive three-year program supported by highly qualified instructional coaches. The

program focuses on improving teaching practice, programmatic effectiveness, and creating environments consistent with high-quality PreK programs. The training in ASPIRE PreK is designed to mirror the three-year induction program required for new teachers in Maryland's school districts. Since its first small pilot in FY 2021, the ASPIRE program has helped create 50 new PreK programs in family child care homes in sixteen school districts, with a goal of over 500 programs across the state by 2031.

We also support HB 1314 because it adds to the funding for the PreK Expansion Grant. The ASPIRE PreK program is currently funded in its entirety by PreK Expansion Grant funds. Expanding the pool of money in the Grant will allow the Alliance to recruit and train additional family child care providers to start new PreK programs. While the grant is set to expire in 2025, HB 1441, which we support, seeks to extend that deadline until 2028. In the meantime, the Alliance will continue working with MSDE to find funding to continue the program. You can find more information about the Alliance and the ASPIRE PreK program below and at www.aspireprek.org.

We hope you will give your support to HB 1314.

The Family Child Care Alliance of Maryland was incorporated as a 501(c)3 in 2019 to develop a staffed family child care (FCC) network. The organization's goal is to provide various types of technical assistance to the over four thousand FCC providers in Maryland. In 2020, in cooperation with the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), the Alliance created the ASPIRE PreK program to grow the supply of state-funded PreK programs in eligible FCC homes. Prior to the creation of the ASPIRE program, MSDE reports that an average of one FCC provider participated in the state-funded PreK program each year.

In the fall of 2023, the ASPIRE PreK program had established fifty PreK programs in eligible FCC homes, with at least one program in sixteen of the state's school districts. All fifty programs are led by a lead teacher with either a P-3 certification or they have a bachelor's degree and are pursuing certification. As of February 2024, over 220 eligible three and four-year-olds are enrolled in these programs, along with over four hundred more children of various ages. We plan to establish over five hundred programs across the state by FY 2031.

The goals of the ASPIRE program are:

- To increase the supply of P-3 certified teachers providing high-quality PreK instruction in FCC homes;
- To build a support network for P-3 certified teachers working in FCC homes;
- To ensure all children in FCC PreK programs, regardless of eligibility for public PreK, enter kindergarten with all the skills they need to succeed and
- To lead the effort to design and test systems to best support PreK in FCC and then make those findings available across the field.

Notes:

1. Licensing statistics produced by the Division of Early Childhood, Maryland State Department of Education, <https://earlychildhood.marylandpublicschools.org/data>, retrieved March 1, 2024.
2. <https://www.marylandfamilynetwork.org/lauras-blog/one-ways-policy-making-supposed-work>, retrieved March 1, 2024

