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Testimony of Julia DeAngelo
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before
House Ways and Means Committee
IN SUPPORT OF
HB 1261: Commission on Access to High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Child Care for
Children Three Years Old and Younger

February 28, 2024

Chairwoman Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in favor of House Bill 1261. My name is Julia DeAngelo, and I am a Program Manager of School Strategies and a co-lead for the Early Childhood Education (ECE) workgroup at Children's National Hospital. Children's National has been serving the nation's children since 1870. Nearly 60% of our patients are residents of Maryland, and we maintain a network of community-based pediatric practices, surgery centers and regional outpatient centers in Maryland.

Formed in 2023, our ECE workgroup is advocating for high quality, affordable early childhood centers and stronger connections between early childhood centers and hospitals as part of our 2022-2025 Community Health Improvement Plan. As a federal requirement for nonprofit hospitals, our 2022 Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) utilized systematic, comprehensive data collection to help us understand and address the needs of the community we serve. Our analysis identified 12 key neighborhoods in our catchment area with the lowest Childhood Opportunity Index (COI) scores, including eight in Prince George's County, Maryland,

that have been the focus for our ECE advocacy and programmatic initiatives.¹ Children’s National and the ECE workgroup strongly support HB 1261, with the stated intent to establish the Commission on Access to High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Child Care for Children Three Years Old and Younger to study implementing universal access to high-quality early childhood education and child care for children 3 years and younger; and requiring the Commission, on or before October 1, 2025, to report its findings and recommendations to the Governor and General Assembly.

According to a recent report by EdSurge, children who attended high-quality early childhood education programs were more likely to graduate from high school, less likely to be placed in special education programs, and less likely to repeat a grade.² Additionally, inequities persist in our current child care system resulting in some families being able to access high-quality early care and education, while other families – prohibited by high cost and low access – are often left behind for the long-term. This Commission would create much needed opportunities to understand the pathways for families to access high-quality early childhood education programs across socioeconomic statuses and provide meaningful findings and recommendations to effect change.

As a result of the pandemic, enrollment in early childhood programs declined across the nation including preschool special education and Head Start programs, which are vital resources for underserved communities.³ Additionally, almost a third of the childcare workforce left their positions in 2021 in Maryland and many early care and education services today find that it is difficult to locate skilled candidates to fill vacancies.^{4,5} Children’s National and the ECE

¹ Children’s National and HSC Health Care System’s Community Health Needs Assessment and Community Health Improvement Plan can be found here: <https://www.childrensnational.org/in-the-community/child-health-advocacy-institute/community-affairs/improving-community-health>

² EdSurge. The Unintended Consequences of Universal Preschool. (2021). In *EdSurge Research*. <https://www.edsurge.com/news/2021-05-10-the-unintended-consequences-of-universal-preschool>

³ National Institute for Early Education Research. (2022). *The State of Preschool 2021*. nieer.org/sites/default/files/2023-10/YB2021_Full_Report.pdf

⁴ Maryland Child Care Resource Network. (2022). Trends in Child Care - 2022. In *Maryland Family Network*. <https://www.marylandfamilynetwork.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/Trends%20in%20Child%20Care%202022.pdf>

⁵ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2023). *HHS Launches the First National Early Care and Education Workforce Center*. <https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2023/02/02/hhs-launches-first-national-early-care-and-education-workforce-center.html>

workgroup recommend that the Commission investigate child care enrollment barriers and strategies to recruit and retain an early childhood workforce, which are imperative to ensuring children and their families can access high quality early learning environments.

I applaud the Maryland General Assembly for introducing this important legislation, which will benefit Maryland's youngest residents and their families, and request a favorable report on House Bill 1261. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. I am happy to respond to any questions you may have.