



County Council Bill 42 – 21: Early Care and Education Coordinating Entity – Established
Montgomery County Community Action Board Testimony
Erika Conner, Executive Committee Member At-Large
November 30, 2021

Good afternoon, Council President Hucker, Vice President Albornoz, and members of the County Council. My name is Erika Conner and I am here today on behalf of the Montgomery County Community Action Board, the County's federally designated anti-poverty group. Our Board supports this bill and the establishment of an early care and education coordinating entity. However, we also have some recommended amendments that I would like to share with Council for your consideration.

As the governing body for Head Start in the County, along with the Head Start Parents Policy Council, the Community Action Board has a special interest in early care and education. We have been longtime advocates for a mixed delivery system that supports family child care providers, child care centers, nonprofit partners, as well as public child care options. This bill can help the County achieve this goal by establishing an entity to coordinate the County's complicated system of public and private child care providers. The new entity must work in full collaboration with DHHS though, which will continue to be responsible for many aspects of the early care and education system, as well as other critical services and programs that families rely on.

We applaud the bill's requirement that the entity's Board of Directors include public and private representatives, including DHHS representatives, parents, center-based providers, and family child care providers. Due to the complex nature of the early care and education system, it is incredibly important to ensure that diverse voices representing the wide array of child care

options in the County be included in the decision-making process. We encourage the Council to consider adding language to this bill that requires representation on the Board of Directors from low-income parents or guardians. Low-income families face some of the greatest challenges obtaining high-quality care for their children. According to the Self-Sufficiency Standard, a family of four with two adults, one infant, and one preschooler will spend \$2,773 each month on child care costs alone.¹ These numbers present extreme challenges for many in our community, especially given the fact that the Self-Sufficiency Standard for this same family is an annual income of \$105,925, but the household would only earn \$63,630 annually at the current Montgomery County minimum wage. We therefore believe that the voices of low-income community members must be heard on any entity that will oversee early care and education in the County.

While this bill states that the coordinating entity must develop recommendations for increasing the availability of early care and education for several populations, including low-income children, we strongly encourage the Council to consider making this a primary focus of the entity's work. Participants in our board's advocacy training program for low-income residents, the Community Advocacy Institute, tell us that child care costs place huge burdens on their families and often stand in the way of obtaining employment. Therefore, we believe that the new coordinating entity must focus on expanding child care subsidies for families and increasing affordable and no cost child care options. The coordinating entity must explore innovative options for low-income families since the current system does not do enough to meet their needs.

The proposed bill requires the new entity to report on its progress, including outcomes data related to the early care and education system. Our board believes that reporting and oversight of the new entity are critical to its success. We must understand the full picture of

¹ https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/Resources/Files/SSS%20Report%20for%20MC_2017_FINAL.pdf

the early care and education system in our County in order to know what barriers remain and what policies and programs should be explored to address these obstacles.

The Community Action Board applauds the Council's ongoing efforts to expand and improve early care and education in Montgomery County. We stand ready to support the Council and the new coordinating entity by sharing our Board's and our agency's expertise in this area. Thank you for the opportunity to share our recommendations with you this afternoon.