

**In support of Montgomery County Council Bill 42-21 Early Care and Education
Coordinating Entity, public hearing
Nov. 30, 1:30 pm.**

My name is Holli Rivera and I am President of Intentional Philanthropy, a philanthropic advisory firm based in Montgomery County that both manages and provides strategic grantmaking services to private foundations, primarily family foundations ranging from \$30M to \$300M. Our clients collectively represent \$1.3B in charitable assets and our very talented Bethesda, Philadelphia and NY team members research, advise and distribute close to \$50M annually between New York City and the District. I am writing to testify in support of Bill 42-21 on the Early Care and Education Coordinating Entity because I am excited for this opportunity in our County having seen in other communities how coordinated efforts to support all of a community's children can lighten the load for parents, equip informal caregivers, and build a stronger workforce to serve as an economic driver of the future.

Thank you Council Vice President Albornoz, and Councilmembers Navarro and Rice for taking the lead on this groundbreaking legislation, and thanks to Council President Hucker, Councilmembers Friedson, Glass, Jawando, Katz and Riemer for their enthusiastic support.

This is a critical step towards ensuring that all children in Montgomery County have the resources and opportunity to develop a solid foundation for life - which includes socio-emotional development, and all of the pre-literacy and pre-numeracy awareness that can help close the achievement gap and lead to greater academic and economic success later in life – and also importantly as we have seen over recent years, increase social cohesion in our communities by mitigating some of the starting line gap.

The purpose of building a “system” or coordinating nonprofit entity for early care and education is not to create a bureaucracy that slows progress or takes the place of any one entity that is already doing fabulous work – such as our own HHS. Instead, its goal is to amplify the efforts already underway - to foster coordination and collaboration, to facilitate knowledge sharing of what works and to identify gaps that are needed but perhaps can't be filled by government or providers alone. As a multi-sector entity with a public-private board, its goal will be to leverage the resources, strengths, and talents of multiple sectors of our community and provide accountability for the growth and shepherding of our most vulnerable citizens and the future of our success – our children.

Why an ECE Entity is Important to me

As a mom, I am grateful for quality care that enabled my daughter's dyslexia to be noticed (or at least suspected) at a very, very early age. But that care cost me close to \$15,000 year. An impossible number for most and, by the way, not particularly easy for me either at the time. Personally, so many of the parents I knew at the time, stepped out of their careers to stay home with their young children because what they earned didn't make sense after taxes and pre-school. Still others, who qualified for government support and programs, chose not to pursue the opportunity because for cultural or other reasons they did not want to “institutionalize” their children. Quality, affordable child-care for all Montgomery County citizens who need it and want it is the base-line, the minimum. But there is so

much more that could be if we lift our eyes. How do we support families who want their children home with grandma but who need grandma to be equipped to not just love but also provide a stimulating environment? How do we help families navigate a vast and complex system when there are language barriers and both parents are working multiple jobs just to make ends meet? How do we evaluate what is working and what is not, objectively and in a timely manner, so that precious years are not lost?

These are some of the questions that a coordinating, independent entity is meant to address.

The framework for the coordinating body outlined in Bill 42-21 is based on extensive research in best practices and knowledge of other models around the country. Surely, we can do this in Montgomery County – and even take it to the next level so that we are a model for others!

Success factors outlined in the legislation that have been highlighted as paramount by those who have gone before us include the following:

- **Independence:** The Entity must be able to act as a neutral convener and as an honest broker of information, actively seeking community input and engagement and disseminating learnings. If it is not truly independent, credibility and the ability to leverage cross sector participation will be lost.
- **Cross-sector representation and leadership:** Equally important is that the Entity have an independent public-private board whose members include government, employers, child care providers, philanthropy, and parents. And this must be real participation and independence – not political rewards and certainly not just because a donor gives funding. This is serious work that needs to include those affected by the system but also board members who are systems thinkers, creative problem solvers and who are motivated beyond self-interest to consider the good of all our children.
 - I do appreciate that in the legislation, the Entity will have three Co-Chairs: a parent, a private sector representative, and a public sector representative.
- **Coordination and Accountability:** The ECE coordinating Entity should not, and as currently written in the legislation, will not deliver programs and services. This fact, plus the independence and cross-sector participation mentioned above, are essential to the Entity serving its primary role – to provide a 360 view of the Early Care and Education system. The entity's role should be to break down silos, to identify needs and solutions not currently being addressed by policy or providers and to create accountability tools to measure overall progress towards shared goals in a comprehensive shared agenda.
- **Inclusion and Community Engagement:** The Entity should also have a fully inclusive view and implement effective community engagement strategies to ensure community priorities are reflected in a common agenda. The entity needs to listen to what parents and providers say they need and combine that with what we know from science and research across diverse communities about supporting young children in order to create a common agenda. And this common agenda must align with the County's racial equity and social justice

strategic plan. The goals developed must be realistic and actionable and the Entity must measure progress toward success.

From my perspective in philanthropy, the Entity will play an important role by providing a neutral, independent venue to receive funding and disseminate information. In philanthropy, we know that we are just intermediaries. We are not the providers on the ground doing the hard work. We are not government that controls the larger funding streams and sets policy. Yet, for strategic donors, we want to come alongside a master plan amplifying successful initiatives and funding the things that may be harder for government to fund. Foundations have this great resource of created wealth and in a number of cases (though not all) staff issue expertise and time that can be shared but we need a venue for investment. Today, if I want to invest in ECE in Montgomery County I can find an array of opportunities but no systematic coordination to tell me where funds can have the greatest impact.

Montgomery County has made considerable investment in strengthening our local ECE infrastructure over the past several years, including providing significant funding through the Early Care and Education Initiative. But we know an immense amount of work remains. And the pandemic exposed some of the gaps and weaknesses that exist and how those gaps had a disproportionate negative effect on those most vulnerable.

There are a myriad of ways that our foundation clients have supported ECE initiatives in various communities that compliment and leverage what is already being done:

- Funding valuable research that leads to evidence-based models for early learning practices in childcare centers, research on models that incorporate wrap around tiered mental- health support or two generation models of care, or what works in home visitation programs.
- Supporting high quality providers to expand their operations through grants or no interest, long terms loans for facility modifications.
- Supporting business planning for childcare owners, many of whom are women and often women of color.
- Supporting policy partners and government agencies by mapping what kinds of services exist and where to ensure that no early learning deserts exist and that culturally sensitive and effective programs are available to all communities not just those who know the system.
- Funding outreach coordinators at nonprofits serving families to educate families on the childcare system so that they can access all services related to ECE and wrap around supports.
- Testing and scaling innovative technology based supports accessible via mobile device to give parents and caregivers who choose not to place their very young children in childcare centers tools, language development tips, and information on games to play with their children or parenting advice to support the caregivers in their role.

In short, we know that Montgomery County has an amazing HHS, MCPS and other complementary public and private programs but we also know it takes a village. The leadership of this County Council and the leadership of our various agencies has been essential. Philanthropy doesn't want to take your place. We know we can't. But we do want to come along with you. So, we urge you to use all the resources found within this village – all of the talent and perspective and resources available across

sectors to pursue bold solutions for the County. For this reason the Bender Foundation, Inc. has stepped forward with a \$50,000 matching grant to encourage investment and support for the Entity described in Bill 42-21. We want to see every child in this county reach their potential. We don't want to wait while the snowball continues to roll down the hill before pushing it back up. We are eager to invest now in the County's bold vision and to support the excellent execution of a shared plan to bring this vision to reality for Montgomery County.

I ask that you vote in support of Bill 42-21 and am grateful for this opportunity to submit written testimony.

Respectfully,
Holli Rivera
President, Intentional Philanthropy