

To: Montgomery County Council
From: Joan Schaffer
Date: 11/15/2021

Subject: Bill 42-21 Early Care and Education (ECE) Coordinating Entity

Congratulations to the Council for initiating this legislation. I am gratified by the unanimous support for its introduction

I have been a significant contributor to the Children's Opportunity Fund (COF) since Kimberly Rusnak took the helm, and an active member of its Steering Committee. I believe that under Kimberly's direction, COF has already made a significant impact on our community. We are fortunate to have a leader of her qualification and commitment in our community. I am writing today, not on behalf of COF, but as a private, passionately interested resident of our County.

As you recognize, too many of our children are not kindergarten ready, and too many are not meeting the critical literacy standards needed by third grade. Clearly, as you point out, systemic racism has created additional barriers for our vulnerable racially and ethnically diverse population.

I have carefully read the proposed legislation; I find much that is commendable.

While the purpose of the new entity is not clearly spelled out in every case, I think your goals are to have it ensure that our County provides high quality ECE to prepare all of our children for kindergarten and beyond. It might be helpful to clearly spell out the Council's interests in having this new organization. As I understand it, the goals include doing the following:

- 1) Convene and consider the views of all participants in our ECE systems in the County
- 2) Provide input and specific recommendations to the County on the organization of Child Care and Education coordination, and policies to govern its practice
- 3) Engage in system- and capacity-building with the ECE providers in the County
- 4) Help implement the recommendations of the Kirwin Commission in the County
- 5) Collect outcomes data on various programs
- 6) Pilot new and innovative approaches in the county (with private dollars)
- 7) Ensure that the above goals all work to remove barriers and increase benefit for our vulnerable children

Importantly, the Council wishes to attract private and business sector dollars to support much of the work of the new Entity.

I believe that the Council has opportunity to fine-tune its recommendations to set the new organization up for success.

My **biggest concern** is related to the Board of Directors so carefully delineated in the proposal.

Its 25 members include 13 government officials and 12 private sector members. Of the 12 private sector members, only 3 come from the business or philanthropic community. I am concerned about this for three reasons.

- Getting a quorum with so many government officials, who have many competing demands will be very difficult. We know this from our experience with COF. While the Steering Committee meets regularly, it has been extraordinarily difficult to pull together the members of our Government-selected Policy Committee.
- I believe that County officials will appropriately feel the need to get input and approval for various actions from their chain of command. As a result, the organization's ability to nimbly adapt to changing circumstances could be significantly hindered. For example, had COF needed to get approval from such a large group to stand up Equity Hubs during the worst of COVID, delays would have been inevitable and unacceptable. I fully acknowledge that Equity Hubs were not perfect, but COF and its involved colleagues responded quickly and improved as the effort continued.
- Experience indicates that private sector donors are leery of contributing to large bureaucratic organizations that are perceived to be government led. We have indications of this with PCC, the Collaboration Council and others. It was precisely the nimble rapid response to a need that enabled COF to rapidly raise over \$1/2 million for Equity Hubs. More representation from donors would increase philanthropic giving.

I would respectfully suggest that the Council Consider include only limited government-official representation on the Board and include others on a larger policy or advisory council.

Additionally, I would recommend the new entity's Board have the freedom to select the non-government Board members, without needing appointment by the executive and approval by the Council. Further, while parents, academics and other nonprofits MUST have seats at the table, in many cases, they can do that more effectively in an advisory or committee capacity rather than as voting Board members who are required for a quorum. I would suggest that the Council consider MCAEL as a model as they deliberate on this topic. A smaller Board (15-17 individuals) with more private participation that receives needed advice from government and educational experts would enable the entity to nimbly respond to the community needs and get more private funding.

Given that the legislation says "any designation under this Section expires 3 years after the resolution is adopted....." the Council has ample opportunity to change directions if they are displeased by the actions of a more independent Board.

Finally, I believe the legislation would be strengthened by clearly delineating all the purposes of the new entity including capacity building and innovation if such activities are intended.

I will be happy to make more specific suggestions on Committee and Board structure prior to Committee meetings.

Thanks for your consideration.