



early learning + extended day

November 23, 2021

Montgomery County Council
100 Maryland Avenue, 4th Floor
Rockville, MD 20850

Dear Councilmembers,

I am writing in support of Bill 42-21, the Early Care and Education Coordinating Entity. Thank you for your attention to and consideration of recommendations that led to the creation of this Bill, which will strengthen the early care and education system in Montgomery County. For too long, our early care and education sector has worked in silos that undermine collaboration and innovation. As we rebuild after the initial impact of the pandemic, it is time to implement new ideas that harness the creativity and vision of what can be, rather than rely on what has always been.

It is incredibly gratifying that the Bill has the support of the entire Council. Thank you, Council Vice President Alborno, and Councilmembers Rice and Navarro for taking the lead on this incredibly important legislation. Thanks to all Council members for your commitment to the importance of this legislation.

I am the Executive Director of Wonders Early Learning + Extended Day, a nonprofit organization of NAEYC accredited early learning programs and high quality extended day programs. We have served the community for 45 years. Our mission is to create and advance high quality diverse educational communities that teach children the foundations of lifelong learning and social responsibility.

At Wonders, we believe in the value of nonprofit leadership in our community. We are excited by the proposed cross sector public/private coordinating entity and see the value in its creation. The proposed entity is based on extensive research in best practices and working knowledge of models across the country - there are proven methods for making this model a success.

Wonders strongly believes in the key elements of the legislation:

- Parents will have a strong voice and authority on the governing board.
- Providers' expertise and experience will be incorporated and providers will be valued partners in governance.
- Community engagement will help shape a common agenda - many voices will be heard and integrated in planning.
- Equity will be a guiding principle that aligns with the County's racial equity and social justice goals.

NON-PROFIT SINCE 1976

main office

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To create and advance high quality, diverse educational communities that teach children the foundation of life-long learning and social responsibility.

The county's business community has come to realize that access to high quality early care and education is an economic imperative. Business leaders in the county have been able to articulate what early care and education providers had not been able to do alone: the economy will not thrive if the business of early care and education does not thrive. A coordinated effort, led by a public/private entity will further elevate the value and importance of our work. As a leader of a nonprofit early education and extended day business, I welcome this milestone shift in understanding the impact we have in the community.

Accountability will be the foundation of an independent cross sector coordinating entity. The 360 view of the Early Care and Education system will ensure that resources are invested in ways that increase children's access to early care and education.

Now more than ever, we need a coordinated effort to strengthen early care and education. This fall, we have faced more challenges than ever before in hiring qualified educators for our programs. This is a crisis for our sector. Because of this staffing shortage, classrooms and programs are unable to open to meet the needs of families. A coordinated public/private entity will have the ability to address this challenge with a holistic approach. It will take expanded coordination between MCPS, Montgomery College, and individual providers to build a pipeline of early educators who see our field as a viable and worthy career. A public/private coordinating entity will be able to leverage its cross-sector approach to address critical issues now and in the future.

I strongly encourage you to vote in support of Bill 42-21. This is an opportunity to truly demonstrate our commitment to the young children in our county.

Best,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joanne Hurt". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Joanne Hurt
Executive Director