

Montgomery Child Care Association, Inc. (MCCA) supports Bill 42-21 which will transform Montgomery County's Early Care and Education (ECE) system through the establishment of a stand-alone public-private ECE Coordinating Entity that can facilitate economic recovery and address inequities in access, affordability, and quality of ECE in the County.

The pandemic exposed the fault lines in the ECE sector, particularly in preschool and school age child care, and has created an opportunity for the County to take bold steps to address the longstanding challenges in providing equitable, sustainable, and affordable ECE to Montgomery County's children and families.

A strong and effective licensed child care system is an integral part of ECE and is essential to the County's recovery from the economic fall out of the pandemic. Early in the pandemic, the County Council established grants to stabilize child care providers, however, more needs to be done on an on-going basis to address the structural damage created by COVID-19. A public-private coordinating entity will facilitate that recovery by helping to identify needs, coordinate policy and allocate resources across the entire ECE sector; including licensed child care providers.

This Entity would ensure a 360-degree view of the entire ECE landscape. An example of the need for this type of comprehensive view occurred two weeks ago when Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) announced the addition of an extra holiday on November 24th. This announcement came with no prior notice to child care providers using public school space for preschool and school age programming. Understandably, MCPS facilities personnel sought to participate in the extra holiday instead of being on duty to open buildings for child care. DHHS' Child Care in Public Space (CCIPS) and the Community Use of Public Facilities (CUPF) tried to identify alternate personnel to cover these openings. With no staffing guarantee for that day and short notice, many child care providers had to consolidate their operations or make the difficult decision to close leaving working parents without child care one day ahead of the Thanksgiving holiday.

An ECE public-private Coordinating Entity could have been helpful in identifying the implementation impact of this type of decision and ensuring the planning, coordination and implementation occurred for all stakeholders in advance of the public announcement. Montgomery County needs a systematic approach to effectively pursue its ECE agenda, build coordination and eliminate silos.

To accomplish this important mission, the ECE public-private Coordinating Entity must be properly funded so that it can attract the level of leadership that will be required for the Entity to fulfill its potential. We understand that the private sector may provide complementary funding but urge the Council to allocate sufficient base funding to set the foundation up for success.

We encourage the County Council to adopt Bill 42-21 and allocate the funding required to establish an independent ECE public-private Coordinating Entity with a robust budget and governing board.

We extend our thanks to Council Vice President Albornoz and Councilmembers Navarro and Rice for taking the lead on this groundbreaking legislation, as well as to Council President Hucker and Councilmembers Friedson, Glass, Jawando, Katz and Riemer for their strong support.

Thank you for your consideration.

Michelle Martineau Green, Executive Director

Montgomery Child Care Association, Inc.