

## **Recommendation Regarding the Early Childhood Coordinating Council**

The Children's Opportunity Alliance, after close consultation with our partners and stakeholders, agrees with the recommendation from the County Executive and Department of Health and Human Services leaders that the County's Early Childhood Coordinating Council (ECCC) be eliminated.

The Children's Opportunity Alliance is planning to set up an advisory board of ECE stakeholders that is similar to the make up of the ECCC body, taking into account the feedback received during our due diligence process. This new body will function to provide strategic and relevant advice to the Entity as it fulfills its duties related to developing an equitable system of high quality, accessible, sustainable early care and education and eliminating systemic racism and structures that created access barriers for vulnerable, racially and ethnically diverse populations.

Historically, the ECCC served as Montgomery County's Local Early Childhood Advisory Council, an optional local body that informs the State Early Childhood Advisory Council. The Children's Opportunity Alliance plans to take on this role, pending the outcome of this legislative process.

## **Background**

In July of 2022, Bill 42-21 designated the Children's Opportunity Alliance (The Alliance) as the County's Early Care and Education Coordinating Entity. During the hearings regarding this legislation, several parties, including the County Attorney's Bill Review Memorandum, pointed out the overlapping duties for the Entity with the existing Early Childhood Coordinating Council (ECCC) – which was established through Bill 13-15 in May of 2015. In its worksession, Council's Joint HHS-E&C committees "decided to defer on the future of the Coordinating Council until after the Entity is up and running."

## **Due Diligence**

Team members from the Alliance have worked closely with the ECCC and staff from DHHS over the last year. Kimberly Rusnak, Executive Director of the Alliance, is a member of the ECCC. Laura Jahromi, Manager, Strategic Initiatives, has also attended each monthly meeting of the ECCC since the inception of the Alliance, so that the Alliance can have a presence in both subcommittees of the ECCC.

In close partnership with staff at the Department of Health and Human Services, including Jennifer Arnaiz, Administrator, Early Childhood Services, we issued a survey to current and previous members of the ECCC. The short, anonymous survey was sent to over 40 individuals.



All recipients were also given the opportunity to schedule a confidential 1:1 conversation with the Alliance's Laura Jahromi. At the ECCC's meeting on June 21, 2023, we shared out the feedback received on the surveys, invited open meeting attendees to add additional thoughts, and facilitated a conversation about solutions and next steps. A small committee of ECCC and Alliance representatives met in July to discuss all feedback received and make a final recommendation on next steps.

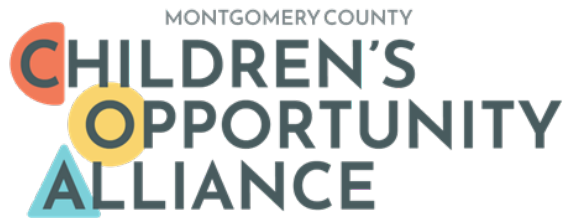
Overwhelmingly, the feedback received through this process suggests that the ECCC's greatest success is that it consists of a multi-disciplinary group of expert stakeholders close to the day-to-day experiences within Montgomery County's early childhood system who regularly gather and advise about issues important to ECE in the County. However, with a lack of funding, inconsistent participation, and the ability to only advise rather than implement recommendations, the impact of the ECCC has been stifled in the past few years. Even more so in the past year since the creation of the Alliance and the uncertainty around the ECCC, there has been a dearth in leadership of the body and its subcommittees. While the ECCC, formerly the Early Care Advisory Council (ECAC), served a valuable role for many years, now, post-pandemic, it is important to update the existing advisory bodies to adapt to the new landscape of ECE in the County.

The Children's Opportunity Alliance deeply embodies a value of inclusive family and community input into strategic decision-making processes that are equitable and prioritize voices of those closest to the issues we are aiming to address. We acknowledge that we have a shared responsibility to work together on behalf of the community to transform our system of early care and education. As such, we believe it is critical to continue to have advisory bodies that are multi-disciplinary and representative of the ECE system's diversity in order to inform strategic recommendations moving forward.

### **Additional Note**

A recommendation to shift the responsibility of staffing the ECCC from DHHS to the Alliance was explored with leadership at DHHS and ultimately, given the nature of the original legislation, DHHS leaders recommended it would be best to eliminate the ECCC and create a new advisory body under the Alliance's direction.

ATTACHED: summary of survey responses; links to padlets used to capture notes during ECCC meeting



## Summary of responses to ECCC Survey

1. What do you think are the strengths and successes of the ECCC?
  - Multi-disciplinary group of expert stakeholders with a wealth of knowledge
  - Local & State advocacy; Provides input to the County Council about issues associated with ECE
  - Holds regular meetings during the work day and has consistent participation from agencies and providers
  - Creation of the ECEI
2. What challenges has the ECCC faced in its ability to fulfill its duties?
  - Only makes recommendations rather than implementing initiatives (with exception of pandemic learning kits)
  - Lack of funding
  - Inability to identify and sustain chair/leaders, lack of leadership & representation on the working groups
  - Inconsistent participation, low attendance at meetings, providers & parents cannot attend during the work day
  - Members are siloed, limited in ability to step outside of their org's priorities
  - Duplication with Commission on Child Care, Community Action Board, ECEI, service parent/community advisory groups
3. Regarding the membership of the ECCC, which members have been critical to helping the ECCC have an impact on the County? What recommendations do you have to ensure a future ECCC body has a successful makeup of members?
  - Diversity of the membership is critical
  - Needs more connection to the State, such as MSDE/OCC, licensing
  - DHHS has outsize influence
  - County government role is not always welcoming to parents
  - Too many appointed agency staff
  - A smaller group could be more productive together
4. What ideas do you have to refresh the ECCC given the changing landscape in the County since its inception in 2015 in order to make it more effective in today's landscape?
  - Clarify and communicate its role, mission, & responsibilities
  - Must be properly funded
  - Require people to attend meetings, pay a membership fee, think/work outside of their organization's silos



- Hold it accountable to achieve its strategic goals and stated outcomes
- Authorize a staff person to serve as a leader with a vision and to make decisions
- Break down siloes, provide more meaningful partnership opportunities
- Use COA and ECEI as permanent bodies, while bringing in representation frequently for input & committee work
- Consider what is duplicative and consolidate
- Change the backbone organization
- Set and measure clear results for all groups

ECCC June 21<sup>st</sup> Meeting: Padlet boards used to capture feedback:

<https://padlet.com/laura2635/eccc-survey-input-reactions-ukau78lrhu0ehquu>

<https://padlet.com/laura2635/eccc-next-steps-tvrpopjm21fmjke5>