

Jul 16, 2025

## Testimony regarding Expedited Bill 23-25 Early Childhood Education Coordinating Entity

Dear County Council Members:

As a member of the County's community of education leaders and child advocates, I am writing to respectfully express my concern about proposed Expedited Bill 23-25 regarding the Early Childhood and Education (ECE) Coordinating Entity, and urge you to amend language that will undermine the entity's capacity to meaningfully serve the community.

It was with great promise and fanfare that the ECE Coordinating Entity was created to address a glaring need in our community: lack of access to high-quality childcare and early childhood education. A remarkable coalition of the business, philanthropy, childcare professionals, and education advocates worked tirelessly to raise awareness of this pressing issue and its impact on our economy and on children. Thanks to support from the County Council, these efforts led to the creation of a new public-private coordinating entity to leverage the talents and skills – and philanthropic resources – of our community to drive change in our local ECE system.

Since the Children's Opportunity Alliance (COA) was named as the Coordinating Entity, it has spearheaded important work to create an inclusive process for multiple stakeholders to provide input and shape a collective vision for how to strengthen early childhood education and childcare in the County. Government agencies involved in ECE have been collaborators and integral to this process, as have childcare providers and early childhood educators, parents, employers and advocates who have identified areas in need of investment and support.

COA has been very successful in prioritizing strategic areas for improvement and raising philanthropic funds to support innovation. This grant-making capacity is a critical function to ensure that the entity is not merely a sounding board, but has the independence to act on its recommendations and make investments in programs and initiatives that cannot be addressed by the County government alone. COA has been a nimble and effective steward of resources, ensuring that it invests in ways that are not duplicative or redundant. And it creates opportunities for more investment in this work than our tax dollars alone can support.

I strongly encourage Council to amend language in the proposed bill that would eliminate the entity's capacity to make grants or in any way constrain its ability to secure philanthropic support and act with agility to strengthen the County's ECE system. This change would diminish the Coordinating Entity's power to drive change in our still under-resourced and under-coordinated ECE system – and would effectively undermine the original intent of the ECE legislation.

Respectfully yours,

Cara Lesser

