



Testimony Favorable with Suggested Changes Expedited Bill 23-25 Early Care and Education Coordinating Entity

My name is Larry Bram, and I am Senior Vice President for Innovation for Easterseals DC MD Va, based in Montgomery County. I am also the parent of an adult child with disabilities who has lived in Montgomery County for her entire life. I am here to speak against some of the proposed changes to the Children's Opportunity Alliance (COA) mandate.

First is the provision that prohibits COA from engaging in "direct services" with early childhood education providers. That would mean it could not enter into contracts, provide grants, or fund ECE seats at childcare providers. Let me give you one clear example about why this is a bad idea. In my career I've written and secured literally hundreds of millions of dollars in grants. And I was an English major, so I mean that "literally." In 2024, Easterseals applied for the to be a state Blueprint Pre-K program. This was (again) literally one of the most difficult applications I have ever seen. I have no idea how a family child care provider or single location child development center owner could ever successfully complete the application. COA has done a lot of work supporting these programs in building their capacity and assisting in these applications. This is a policy goal we want to support; this proposed change would prevent that work.

The second item is the removal of many references to having a duty to address inequities. I get the pressure to remove language that the current federal administration might deem Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility. I refuse to use the acronym. It was not so long ago, however, that Montgomery County bravely required all actions be evaluated through just such a lens. Try getting inclusive child care for a child with disabilities, even now, more than 50 years after the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and 35 years after the Americans with Disabilities Act. I can tell, you...it is very difficult. At Easterseals, we routinely see children 2-years-old who have been "expelled" from multiple programs as if the child is to blame. There is still so much work to do, and we should never forget that or hamstring efforts to make it better. COA should continue to be able to have that as a central component of their mission—to foster Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility of all kinds. Disability, race, economic status, religion. Montgomery County should be proud of its focus on this and never back down. We need to remove the barriers that allow all the county's children to get a world-class early education.

I admit that I was at first skeptical about the creation of COA, but over the years I've become a big supporter and now serve on several of their committees. They are leading the way by thinking big, with a focus on strategy and systemic innovation, all while offering real hands-on support to the programs that need it. It is critical that COA maintain a 360-degree view of the sector and pilot new ideas and fill the gaps that can be supported by philanthropy and an independent nonprofit that can be more nimble and quick compared to government agencies.

Please, I urge you to further empower COA, not hamstringing it.