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My name is Randi Albertsen, and I am an Early Childhood Education specialist and the owner of Innovations in Education, LLC, serving providers and families throughout Montgomery County and beyond. I am writing today to express my strong support for the Children's Opportunity Alliance (COA) and to share my deep concerns about the proposed legislation that would prohibit COA from engaging in "direct services" with early childhood education (ECE) providers.

Over the past two years, my work with COA has been transformative—not only for my organization and the providers I support, but for the broader early childhood community in Montgomery County. COA's mission—to build an equitable, accessible, affordable, high-quality, and sustainable early childhood system—has become a reality through its hands-on partnerships with educators, programs, and families.

### **Direct Service is Essential for Real Impact**

The proposed legislation would prevent COA from entering into contracts, providing grants, or funding ECE seats for childcare providers. This restriction is not just a technicality; it fundamentally limits COA's ability to respond to the needs of our sector. While the transition of Pre-K application and back-office support to the county is underway, there is still a critical need for COA to "fill gaps" during this transition period—and likely beyond. COA's ability to offer grants, contracts, and capacity-building support has been essential for outreach, mentoring, and supporting providers who might otherwise be left behind.

Simply put, we cannot foresee all the challenges or innovative strategies that may emerge in the years to come. Prohibiting COA from engaging in direct services would limit the organization's ability to respond to changing needs, as it has consistently demonstrated agility, responsiveness, and creative problem-solving. The flexibility to pilot new ideas, respond quickly to provider needs, and support programs directly is what has made COA so effective.

### **First-Hand Work Builds Knowledge, Credibility, and Systemic Change**

One of the most valuable aspects of COA's work is its direct engagement with providers. By working closely with childcare centers and family childcare programs, COA has gained valuable knowledge and credibility. This first-hand experience has allowed us to advocate more effectively to the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) and the Accountability and Implementation Board (AIB) for changes to the Blueprint for Maryland's Future. We know what's happening on the ground. We see where the gaps are. And we can speak with authority about what providers and families truly need.

This on-the-ground perspective is irreplaceable. Without it, our advocacy would be less informed, less credible, and ultimately less effective.

## **COA's Track Record: Building Capacity and Advancing Equity**

In just the past three years, COA has:

- Set county-wide goals for improving kindergarten readiness and increasing access to publicly subsidized seats.
- Partnered with community-based organizations to support outreach, mentoring, and capacity-building for family childcare programs.
- Increased transparency and inclusion by bringing diverse stakeholders—providers, parents, nonprofits, businesses, and philanthropy—to the decision-making table.
- Helped providers navigate and access Blueprint Pre-K expansion grants, building a stronger mixed-delivery system.
- Created public-facing tools like a data dashboard and fiscal map to inform and empower the community.
- Advocated for systems change at both the local and state levels, ensuring that provider and family voices are heard.

These accomplishments were only possible because COA has been able to work directly with providers, listen to their needs, and respond with targeted resources and support.

### **Don't Tie Our Hands—Let COA Continue to Innovate**

The changes proposed in this legislation would limit innovation and undermine the very purpose for which COA was created. We urge you to allow COA to continue engaging in direct services, so it can remain nimble, responsive, and effective in meeting the needs of Montgomery County's youngest children and the educators who serve them.

We respectfully request that you remove the prohibition on direct services from this legislation and allow COA to continue partnering with providers in meaningful, impactful ways.

Thank you for your leadership and your commitment to early childhood education. Please ensure that COA can continue to do the work that matters most—work that changes lives and builds a brighter future for all children in our community.

Respectfully,



Randi Albertsen

Owner, Innovations in Education, LLC