

My name is Kristen Wong Callisto, I am a resident of Silver Spring. I am submitting this testimony in my personal capacity because as a brand-new parent of one little boy (8 months), this issue is closer to me than it's ever been.

I am a supporter of Children's Opportunity Alliance both because I was in the same Leadership Montgomery cohort as ED, Kim Rusnak, but also because as a lifelong educator and now as a new parent, building an equitable, accessible, affordable, high-quality, and sustainable early childhood system that narrows disparities and puts all young children on a path to reach their greatest potential aligns with my personal and professional values.

When I was pregnant, I read about how much child care cost, but like a lot of things, it registered differently once my son was actually here and I realized I was *very* behind the ball on finding affordable, high-quality child care. While on one hand, MoCo is a vibrant, dynamic community with so much to offer, which justifies to a degree the high cost of living. On the other hand, the high cost of living means there's little room even in a two-income household for the ridiculous cost of childcare.

I applaud you all as leaders for creating the Children's Opportunity Alliance and having the vision and understanding about the importance of early childhood. I want MoCo to lead the way here because I believe that leading in this space is a critical investment both in our future but also in our current adults. If parents can go to work without worrying about childcare and its affordability, we all benefit from that.

As career special educator, I know from experience that early intervention MATTERS. The first five years of life, and particularly the first three, are a critical stage in human development – laying the foundation for all future learning, behavior and health. Well-prepared and supported educators can provide intentional experiences that support children's learning and development, helping to build the critical cognitive, physical, social and emotional skills that can set them up for a lifetime of success.

The reality is nearly every family, regardless of income, employment status, race, gender, or geographic location needs support for their youngest children. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services considers child care affordable when it costs families no more than 7% of their household income – but most families in Montgomery County are paying between 25-30% of their income to pay for child care. That's more than many families' mortgage or rent payment. COA has set county-wide goals to increase access and affordability and the new legislative changes will limit COA's ability to work toward achieving those goals.

I understand the legislation needs to be amended and we understand the concerns related to duplication, however these changes (related to not awarding or funding grants, not

entering into contracts with child care providers, not providing goods and services to child care providers and not funding seats), seem to be written from one particular perspective and have lost sight of the broader view of the implications on the ECE system COA is trying to facilitate for our region.

COA has been working toward a shift that is one of inclusive leadership. This means that COA is trying to lead in a way that focuses on creating a work and partnership environment where all individuals feel valued, respected, and empowered to contribute. COA is actively promoting diversity and inclusion, and ensuring that everyone has an equal opportunity to participate and succeed. These legislative changes feel very top down and not inclusive of the perspectives of the proximity experts of early childhood professionals and families. COA is trying to build a transformative mindset where multiple stakeholders are at the decision-making table – parents, early childhood educators, nonprofit partners and advocates, business, philanthropy and government partners and policy makers. I support COA in their request for additional time to work with our various stakeholders to present amendments that are in alignment with what we all can agree upon.