

Good afternoon, Council President and Members of the County Council,

My name is [Your Name], and I serve on the board of the Children's Opportunity Alliance (COA). Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

I am here to express my opposition to the amendments proposed in Expedited Bill 23-25, which I believe would limit COA's ability to fulfill its mission and deliver the coordinated, equity-focused work this Council has charged us with.

I also want to note that COA board service is voluntary. The majority of board members, like me, give their time freely, without compensation, because we care deeply about the families and providers in this County. In contrast, ex-officio board members serve as part of their government roles and are compensated through their employment. This distinction is important because it highlights the personal commitment and community perspective that volunteer members bring to this work.

I want to briefly raise three key points about this legislation.

First, I want to provide context on the term "duplicative services," which has come up frequently in board discussions and finance committee meetings whenever new ideas are raised about expanding access or improving support for the early care community. While the phrase sounds efficient, it can unintentionally discourage innovation and collaboration. It suggests that any initiative that touches similar goals is redundant, even when the purpose is to reach underserved families or improve equity. In fields like healthcare, duplication, meaning providing the same service in the same place, can drive up costs and reduce efficiency. But COA does not duplicate County programs; it complements them. Our work is about systems-building: convening partners, aligning services, and addressing longstanding racial and economic disparities in early care. The purpose of COA is to coordinate efforts so families experience a seamless and responsive system.

Second, the proposed limitations on COA's grantmaking authority would reduce, not improve, efficiency and effectiveness.

COA's small, strategic grants enable nimble investments that directly align with County priorities, particularly in reaching underserved providers and families. We have supported family child care

programs in navigating Maryland's Pre-K expansion, provided trauma-informed training to early educators, and boosted enrollment in nutrition programs for young children. Restricting this flexibility would prevent us from reaching precisely the communities the County seeks to serve.

Third, and on a lighter note, I cannot help but notice the turnout today.

Given how often this Council and Superintendent Dr. Thomas Taylor have spoken about the importance of early care, you might expect the room to be packed with parents and advocates. But as we all know, raising a child from birth to five is hard work, and many parents simply do not have the time or energy to testify on a Tuesday afternoon. In fact, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, about 75 percent of young children live in families where all available parents or caregivers participate in the labor force. That means at least two exhausted adults, or one overextended parent, balancing work, care, and everything else. So please do not mistake today's turnout for a lack of interest. It is a reminder of why this work is so important.

In closing, I urge you to reject the proposed amendments in Expedited Bill 23-25, preserve COA's ability to differentiate rather than duplicate services, maintain flexibility in grantmaking, and recognize that the absence of families here today underscores the importance of ensuring their voices remain centered in this process.

Thank you for your time and consideration.