



# **BALTIMORE CITY COUNCIL EDUCATION, YOUTH, & OLDER ADULTS COMMITTEE**

## **Mission Statement**

On behalf of the Citizens of Baltimore City, the mission of the **Education, Youth, and Older Adults (EYOA)** Committee is to study, review, and recommend policies that enhance educational opportunities, support the well-being and development of young people, and improve the quality of life for older adults. The committee is committed to fostering equitable access to high-quality education, advocating for youth empowerment, and ensuring that aging residents have the resources and services necessary to thrive.

**The Honorable John Bullock**

**CHAIR**

**PUBLIC HEARING**

**March 19, 2026**

**12:30PM**

**CLARENCE "DU" BURNS COUNCIL CHAMBERS**

***LO25-0040***

***First Steps, Strong Start: Early Learning in  
Baltimore City***

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# EDUCATION, YOUTH, & OLDER ADULTS COMMITTEE

**The Honorable John Bullock**  
CHAIR

## Legislative Oversight Hearing

*LO25-0040*

*First Steps, Strong Start: Early Learning in Baltimore City*

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For purpose of investigating the early learning landscape in Baltimore City in an effort to identify gaps in access, the conditions necessary for fiscal sustainability, and the accountability structures that ensure success for both Head Start and the mixed-delivery prekindergarten system for 3 and 4 year old students required by the Blueprint for Maryland's Future.

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### ***BACKGROUND***

Early childhood education policy in Baltimore is largely shaped by [The Blueprint for Maryland's Future](#) enacted in 2021. The law establishes a ten-year statutory framework to expand access to high-quality early childhood education statewide. Within the Blueprint, Pillar 1: Early Childhood Education focuses specifically on measurable goals related to Pre-K expansion, program quality standards, funding formulas, and accountability mechanisms. Oversight of implementation is provided by the [Accountability and Implementation Board](#) (AIB), which reviews and approves local implementation plans and monitors progress toward statewide benchmarks.

[Pillar 1](#) establishes a phased expansion of publicly funded full-day prekindergarten for four-year-olds from families earning up to 300 percent of the federal poverty level. Expansion began in fiscal year 2023 and continues through fiscal year 2026 and beyond, prioritizing income-eligible families first while moving toward broader access. Programs must meet high-quality standards aligned with the Maryland College and Career Ready Standards. The policy also requires a mixed-delivery model, meaning local school systems must partner with private childcare providers and community-based organizations to expand seat capacity and maintain family choice.

Additional elements of Pillar 1 include expanded access to [Judy Centers](#) and [Patty Centers](#), which provide wraparound services such as family engagement, health screenings, and social services coordination. The Blueprint also increases investment in the [Maryland Infants and Toddlers Program](#) to strengthen early identification and intervention services for children with disabilities. Workforce provisions aim to improve educator qualifications and compensation over time to align more closely with K–12 standards. The expected outcomes of these policies include improved kindergarten readiness, reduced early achievement gaps, stronger third-grade literacy outcomes, and improved long-term academic trajectories.

While the Blueprint establishes statewide goals and timelines, implementation occurs primarily at the local level. Each county board of education must submit a multi-year implementation plan to the AIB outlining how it will expand Pre-K seats, partner with private providers, and meet quality benchmarks. Funding flows through the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), which distributes state aid, sets regulatory guidance, and monitors compliance. Local responsibilities include expanding facilities, recruiting staff, and developing contracts and oversight systems for private providers participating in the mixed-delivery model. Counties must also ensure classrooms meet class size limits, teacher credentialing requirements, and curriculum alignment standards established by MSDE.

In Baltimore, implementation progress is documented by the [Early Childhood Advisory Council \(ECAC\)](#). [The ECAC’s 2025 Early Childhood Landscape Analysis](#) notes continued expansion of mixed-delivery Pre-K programs with growing participation from community-based providers operating under public funding standards. The report identifies workforce shortages, compensation differences, and facility capacity constraints as ongoing challenges. Baltimore City has historically invested in Pre-K programs and is close to meeting Blueprint capacity goals for low-income four-year-olds. Estimates indicate that Pre-K seats are available for approximately 98 percent of low-income four-year-olds, though coverage for all four-year-olds is closer to 65 percent. Despite expansion efforts, relatively few new seats have been added in the past two years, and mixed-delivery seats accounted for roughly 8 percent of total Pre-K seats in the 2024–2025 school year. With an estimated population of approximately 37,232 children ages 0–5 in Baltimore City, current early care and education programs, including childcare, Head Start, and Pre-K, serve roughly half of that population.

**Table 8. Estimated Early Care and Education Seats for Children Under Five in Baltimore City (as of May 2024)**

Early Care and Education Setting	Number of Programs	Capacity
Licensed Family Care	382	2,999
Licensed Center (including Head Start)	283	13,890
Subtotal		16,889
Estimate for below age five (80% of subtotal)		13,511
City Schools Pre-K (2023–2024)		4,480*
Pre-K Expansion Sites (2023–2024)		267*
Estimated Total Capacity Early Care and Education		18,258

Source: Maryland Family Network, LOCATE Child Care, May 2024 and Baltimore City Public Schools, Pre-K availability. Compilation by author. \*These are 2023–2024 school year numbers and are used to be consistent with other data pulled in May of 2024. Elsewhere in this document, data from 2024–2025 are used.

**Table 30. Estimating Total Pre-K Seats for Four-Year-Olds Citywide**

Site	Total(s)
Public Pre-K (2024-2025)	3,800
Existing Pre-K Expansion Grantees (2024-2025)	386
Non-public school enrollment of four-year-olds (2023) <sup>24</sup>	654
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,840</b>

\*Baltimore City ECAC Landscape Analysis (pages 46-58)

Federal early childhood policy also shapes the local landscape. The primary federal funding source for early learning programs is [Head Start](#), which received approximately \$12.27 billion nationally in fiscal year 2025. In Baltimore City, the program operates through a federal grant of roughly \$9 million and prioritizes enrollment for families with the greatest need, including children with disabilities, those experiencing homelessness, and those in foster care. Local Head Start and Early Head Start programs collectively have a capacity of approximately 2,354 seats.

Staffing requirements for early learning classrooms are also influenced by Blueprint policy. Under current statutory requirements, the mixed-delivery model gradually increases the share of publicly funded Pre-K seats that must be delivered by eligible private providers, from 20 percent in the 2025–2026 school year to 50 percent by 2028. At the same time, private and community-based providers participating in publicly funded Pre-K must meet the same training and compensation standards as public school educators. In Baltimore City, starting salaries for teachers meeting minimum certification requirements in public Pre-K classrooms began at approximately \$63,482 in 2024. Enrollment data show that many City Schools Pre-K classrooms are not currently filled to capacity; in the 2024–2025 school year, approximately 86 percent of seats were filled, in part because Pre-K participation is not compulsory.

Program quality in Maryland’s early childhood system is monitored through multiple mechanisms. The state’s primary quality rating and improvement system is [Maryland EXCELS](#), a voluntary system in which providers can receive ratings from Level 1 to Level 5 based on licensing compliance, staff qualifications, professional development, learning practices, family engagement, and administrative policies. Participation can influence eligibility for certain funding streams and incentives. Head Start programs are evaluated separately using the CLASS observation system, which assesses program quality through domains including emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support. Programs must meet minimum CLASS thresholds to maintain their federal grant status.

Together, the Blueprint’s statutory framework, federal programs such as Head Start, state quality monitoring systems, and local implementation efforts define the structure of the early childhood education landscape in Baltimore City and across Maryland. Implementation success will be measured through indicators such as enrollment growth, kindergarten readiness, literacy outcomes, and long-term academic achievement.

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***FISCAL NOTE***

At this time, the proposed action does not create a direct fiscal impact on the City of Baltimore. Implementation of prekindergarten expansion under the Blueprint for Maryland's Future is primarily funded through state education formulas administered by the Maryland State Department of Education and implemented by Baltimore City Public Schools. Federal programs such as Head Start are funded through federal grants. Therefore, no additional City appropriations are required as a result of this item.

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Analysis by: Juliane Jemmott  
Analysis Date: 3/11/2026

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# BALTIMORE CITY COUNCIL



## EDUCATION, YOUTH, & OLDER ADULTS COMMITTEE

*LO25-0040*

*First Steps, Strong Start: Early Learning in  
Baltimore City*

# Public Testimony



Strategic  
Thinking for  
SOCIAL  
CHANGE

**Written Testimony Submitted by Martha Holleman**  
**Baltimore City Council Hearing: First Steps, Strong Start: Early Learning in Baltimore City**  
**March 19, 2026**

I write today to applaud the City Council's leadership on early care and education (ECE); to reiterate the importance of ECE to the healthy development and lifetime success of the city's children, to the ability of parents to work and pursue their own education and training, and to the overall economic prosperity of the city and its people; and, in particular -- given the topic of today's Hearing -- to highlight gaps and opportunities that the council itself might attend around the expansion of pre-K in the City.

Around the country, major cities have made "universal" (that is free and open to all) pre-K a centerpiece of their investments in children and families (see summary attached). They have done so for two principal reasons:

- To advance the school readiness and academic success of young children.
- To support and retain families.

Interest in and support for public Pre-K in Baltimore remains high. In a soon-to-be-released report summarizing findings from a survey of over 400 Baltimore City parents, researchers find that parents of all income levels, races, and ethnicities identify public pre-K as *the* preferred setting for the early care and education of three- and four-year-olds.<sup>1</sup>

Despite major investments from City Schools starting in 2008 and the State's adoption of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future, we are far from offering universal pre-K in Baltimore. *Baltimore City's Early Care and Education Landscape Analysis* (of which I was co-author) estimates that current capacity exists to serve up to 98% of four-year olds from low-income families (at or below 300% of FPL); but only 65 to 70% of all four-year-olds. Very few three-year-olds are enrolled.

Broad public support and demonstrated need and opportunity are not yet reflected in State and City leadership and investment. The Baltimore City Council can work with other city elected officials to demand a coordinated financing plan from the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), Baltimore City Schools (City Schools) and the City's own Department of Finance to scale pre-K.

Based on years of study and discussion, it is my recommendation that this plan include financing and facilities for universal Pre-K for four-year-olds within City Schools and up front financing for low income three-year-olds in mixed delivery settings (the current process of grant funding as led by MSDE has to-date yielded only small gains in seats and providers).

Expanded pre-K in Baltimore can be the foundation for future prosperity and growth – for our children, for our families and for our City. Let's do this.

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<sup>1</sup> University of Virginia, School of Education. *The Early Care and Education Experiences of Baltimore Families: Choices, Preferences, Challenges and Needs*. Forthcoming.

Public Investments in Early Care and Education: Examples from US Cities and States  
(as of January 2026)

Investment	Jurisdiction	Background
<b>Universal early care and education</b>	New Mexico	Free to all children birth to age five (funded by state oil and gas revenue)
	New York City	Commitment to free childcare for all two-year-olds and universal pre-K for all three- and four-year-olds (in partnership with the NY State's commitment to universal pre-K)
	San Francisco	Free to all children under age five from low- and moderate-income families (family of four making less than \$230,000)
<b>Universal Pre-K</b>	Boston	Free to all three- and four-year-olds
	Chicago	Free full day for all four-year-olds, limited half day seats for three-year-olds
	Florida	Free to all four-year-olds (three hours/ half day)
	New York City	Free to all three and four-year-olds
	Oklahoma	Free to all four-year-olds
	Vermont	Free for 10 hours a week to all three- and four-year-olds (tuition for full day on a sliding scale)
	Washington, D.C.	Free to all three- and four-year-olds
<b>Childcare subsidies for parents</b>	Montgomery County	Montgomery County Working Parents Assistance Program / Supplement to state's Child Care Scholarship. Eligible to families at 220% of the FPL
	Washington, DC	The DC Child Care Subsidy Program eligible to families at 300% of FPL
<b>Salary subsidies for early care educators (wage subsidies)</b>	Washington, D.C.	The Early Childhood Educator Pay Equity Fund provides support to qualified programs to increase staff compensation
<b>Facilities / Capital Investments</b>	Montgomery County	\$4 million for low interest and forgivable loans for to providers to add space for infants and toddlers

Current Baltimore and Maryland ECE investments available to City families and providers

Investment	Jurisdiction	Background
<b>Pre-K Expansion</b>	Maryland	Free to four-year-olds from families with annual incomes at 300% of the FPL or below. Others on a sliding scale. Proposed expansion to three-year-olds with same funding structure
	Baltimore	Available to four-year-olds from families with annual incomes at 300% FPL or below. Others, including a small number of three-year-olds, as space allows
<b>Childcare subsidies for parents</b>	Maryland	Maryland Childcare Scholarship eligible to families earning up to 75% of the state AMI.  Currently frozen due to state budget pressures. Not accepting new applicants unless children drop out
<b>Facilities / Capital Investments</b>	Maryland	Child Care Capital Support Revolving Loan Fund provides no-interest loans to providers

## Summary of the Child Care Improvement Workgroup Resolution

This resolution establishes the **Prince George’s County Child Care Improvement Workgroup**, a temporary advisory body tasked with analyzing and recommending improvements to child care availability, affordability, and quality in the County.

### Key Findings (from the “Whereas” clauses)

- Child care access is essential for family well-being, workforce participation, and child development.
- Child care capacity in the County **declined 5% from 2022–2025**.
- Only **12%** of child care centers are licensed for infant care.
- Child care costs **increased more than 20%** from 2017–2025.
- The average single-family household in Maryland spends **41% of annual income** on child care.
- Child care workers face **low wages and workforce shortages**.
- Overlapping State and County inspections can burden providers and hinder expansion.
- Existing organizations like **Child Resource Connect** and the **Maryland Family Network** provide data and support.

### Purpose

To convene experts and stakeholders to provide the County Council with recommendations for:

- Streamlining administrative and inspection processes
- Improving child care licensing and funding
- Developing strategies toward **universal child care** in the County

### Workgroup Structure

The group will consist of **nine members**, including representatives from:

1. County Council (serving as Chair)
2. County Executive
3. Child Resource Connect
4. A licensed child care center operator
5. A licensed family child care home operator
6. A parent with a child in licensed care
7. Maryland State Department of Education, Office of Child Care
8. Prince George’s County Public Schools
9. Maryland Family Network

The Workgroup may also consult additional experts and request data from agencies as needed.

### **Meeting Requirements**

- Must meet **at least twice per month** until the final report is submitted.

### **Reporting Timeline**

The Workgroup must submit:

1. **By July 1, 2026:**  
Recommendations on permitting and streamlining County review processes
2. **By September 1, 2026:**  
State legislative recommendations on licensing and funding
3. **By December 1, 2026:**  
A final report including a plan to implement **universal child care** in the County

### **Expiration**

The Workgroup will automatically dissolve **90 days after submitting its final recommendations**, at which point the resolution becomes void.

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## SUMMARY OF THE CHILD CARE FACILITIES LOAN PROGRAM BILL

### Purpose of the Bill

The bill creates a **Child Care Facilities Loan Program** to help preserve, expand, and improve child care services in Prince George's County. The program aims to increase the number of children receiving licensed care at reasonable costs by offering financial assistance to child care center operators and family day care homes. [\[Child Care...aft 1.docx | Word\]](#)

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### Key Components of the Program

#### 1. Establishment & Administration

- The **Director of Family Services** must establish and administer the program.
  - The program becomes part of the County's **Economic Development Incentive (EDI) Fund**.
  - At least **\$500,000** of the EDI Fund must be reserved for the program, and the total outstanding loan balance cannot exceed that amount. [\[Child Care...aft 1.docx | Word\]](#)
- 

#### 2. Eligibility

- Both **nonprofit and for-profit** child care centers and family day care homes qualify.
  - Priority goes to facilities serving **low-income children** or **children with disabilities**.
  - Loan recipients must agree to continue providing child care services for at least the loan term. [\[Child Care...aft 1.docx | Word\]](#)
- 

#### 3. Allowable Uses of Funds

Loans may only be used for **capital improvements**, including:

- Buying land or buildings

- Constructing, repairing, or renovating child care facilities
  - Purchasing furniture/equipment with at least a 3-year useful life
  - Professional services needed for facility construction or renovation (architects, engineers, lawyers, etc.)
  - Meeting licensing, zoning, or building requirements  
[\[Child Care...aft 1.docx | Word\]](#)
- 

#### 4. Loan Amounts and Terms

- Maximum loan to any **single family day care provider: \$10,000**
  - Interest rate:
    - **0% for the first year**
    - **Below commercial rates** thereafter, reflecting the County's borrowing and administrative costs
  - Loans may supplement other government program loans.  
[\[Child Care...aft 1.docx | Word\]](#)
- 

#### Reporting Requirements

The program must be included in the quarterly EDI Fund report to the County Council, detailing:

1. Names and locations of loan recipients
  2. How loan funds were used
  3. Number of additional children served  
[\[Child Care...aft 1.docx | Word\]](#)
- 

#### Related Amendments

- Updates to Subtitle 10 clarify that the EDI Fund may be used to **promote preservation and expansion of child care** through this loan program. [\[Child Care...aft 1.docx | Word\]](#)
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#### Implementation

- The Act takes effect **45 days after becoming law.**

- Includes a standard severability clause.

## Summary of the 2026 Use and Occupancy Permit Fees Bill

This bill creates **new fees and rules** for certain businesses in Prince George’s County that are considered to have a **negative impact on quality of life**, including businesses that sell alcohol, tobacco, firearms, or operate self-storage facilities.

### Purpose of the Bill

The bill aims to:

- Establish **specific use and occupancy (U&O) permit fees** for certain high-impact businesses.
- Create **annual renewal fees** for these businesses.
- Establish a **Quality of Life Improvement Fund** to support community programs.
- Adjust county law to reflect these new requirements.

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### Key Provisions

#### 1. New \$5,000 U&O Permit Fee for Specific Businesses

Before receiving a Use & Occupancy Permit, the following business types must pay a **\$5,000 fee**:

- Liquor stores and other businesses with a **Class A beer, wine, and liquor license**.
- **Tobacco shops**, vape shops, and other retail tobacco businesses.
- **Firearm dealers** licensed by the State of Maryland.
- **Self-storage (consolidated storage) facilities**.

#### 2. New Annual \$5,000 Renewal Fee

- These businesses must pay a **\$5,000 renewal fee every 12 months** after applying for their initial permit.
- **Existing businesses** must begin paying this annual renewal fee **starting January 1, 2027**, and then every January 1 thereafter.
- Failure to pay results in the **U&O permit being invalid and revoked**.

#### 3. Optional Courtesy Notice and Grace Period

- The permitting department **may** notify businesses 90 days before a renewal is due.
- A grace period **of up to 90 days** may be granted for late payments.

#### 4. Automatic Annual Fee Increase

Every February 1, the fees will increase based on:

- The **CPI-U for the Washington region**, or
- **0%**, whichever is greater.

#### 5. Quality of Life Improvement Fund

The bill creates a **nonlapsing fund** that collects all fees from these businesses. The funds will be used for community improvements such as:

- Youth programs, child care, and education initiatives.
- Public health and senior wellness programs.
- Public and pedestrian safety initiatives.
- Economic assistance for disadvantaged residents and businesses.

#### Required Distributions

At the time fees are collected:

- **10%** goes to the **Early Start Child Care Scholarship Fund**.
  - **5%** goes to the **Child Care Facilities Loan Program**.
  - All other spending must be approved by Council resolution.
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#### 6. Effective Date

The bill takes effect **45 days after becoming law**.

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#### 7. Additional Context (from Findings Section)

The bill cites data showing that:

- High density of alcohol outlets is linked to violence and injuries.
- Tobacco use contributes heavily to disease and youth nicotine addiction.
- Firearm-related deaths in the county are high and increasing among youth.
- Self-storage facilities can pose health, safety, and environmental risks.

These findings justify the creation of higher fees and community investments.

## Summary of the Child Care Expansion and Quality Improvement Act

This bill establishes a comprehensive framework to **expand child care availability, improve quality, and streamline operations** across Prince George's County.

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### Purpose

The Act aims to increase access to affordable, high-quality child care; reduce regulatory burdens; better use public facilities; and support early childhood development and family economic stability.

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### Major Components

#### 1. Legislative Findings

The County Council identifies several challenges:

- **Declining child care capacity** (down 5% between 2022–2025).
  - **Rising costs** (up over 20% since 2017).
  - **Duplicative inspections** causing delays in expanding capacity.
  - **Public facilities** as valuable potential child care sites.
  - The **critical role** of early childhood education in long-term development.
  - The economic benefits of **accessible, affordable child care** for families and the workforce.
- 

#### 2. New Subtitle 5A – Early Childhood Education and Child Care

##### Key Definitions

The Act defines:

- **Before/after-school care programs**
  - **Child care** and exclusions (e.g., scouting, Sunday school)
  - **Child care programs**, including centers and family child care providers
-

### **3. Establishment of a County Child Care Navigator**

The County Executive must designate a **Child Care Navigator** within the Department of Family Services to:

- Assist providers with licensing and inspections
- Coordinate among County agencies to expand child care
- Act as a public liaison
- Maintain an inventory of suitable County properties for child care
- Develop a **Strategic Plan for Child Care**, including:
  - Early childhood service improvements
  - Child care in public spaces
  - Public-private partnerships
  - Research on supply, demand, affordability
  - Kindergarten readiness strategies

### **Annual Reporting**

By February 1 each year, the Navigator must report activities, accomplishments, and progress toward the Strategic Plan.

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### **4. Expanding Child Care in Public Spaces**

The Navigator must work with agencies to:

- Facilitate use of County-owned buildings (schools, libraries, recreation centers, etc.)
  - Develop **standard MOUs** to simplify facility use
  - Streamline inspections for programs operating in public spaces
- 

### **5. County Property Inventory for Child Care**

A maintained, annually updated inventory of suitable County properties must consider:

- Local demand and availability
  - Compatibility with existing uses
  - Property condition and accessibility
  - Cost of necessary modifications
  - Zoning and land-use conformity
-

## 6. Child Care Impact Statements for Capital Projects

For each applicable capital project, the Office of Management & Budget must analyze:

- Feasibility of adding child care facilities
- Required budget modifications
- Compatibility with the project
- Demand for child care in the area
- Zoning considerations

Priority must be given to **high-need, low-income areas** where child care is not otherwise financially feasible.

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### Other Provisions

- Severability clause
- Act takes effect **45 days after becoming law**

## Summary of the Early Start Child Care Scholarship Program Bill

This bill establishes the **Prince George's County Early Start Child Care Scholarship Program**, designed to help **modest-income families living inside the Beltway** pay for child care for **children ages 0–3**.

### Key Provisions

#### 1. Program Creation

- Creates a **nonlapsing Early Start Child Care Scholarship Fund** used solely for awarding child care scholarships.
- The program is administered by the **Department of Family Services**, with disbursements made by the **Office of Finance**.

#### 2. Eligibility Requirements

##### Family Eligibility

- Must live **inside the Beltway** in Prince George's County.
- Must have a **household income below 30%** of the Washington, DC area median income (based on annual HUD data).

##### Child Eligibility

- Child must be **age 3 or younger**.
- Scholarships allowed for **up to two children per household**.

#### 3. Eligible Child Care

- Care must be provided in a **licensed or approved child care center** or **family child care home** located within Prince George's County.
- Complies with COMAR or military child care regulations.

#### 4. Scholarship Details

- Maximum scholarship: **\$3,000 per child** for a **12-month period**.
- Actual award amounts will follow a **need-based formula**, with lower-income families receiving larger awards.

#### 5. Regulations & Implementation

- The Department must propose regulations by **September 1, 2026**.
- Council approval is required for regulations and any future modifications.

## 6. Reporting

- By **August 31 each year**, the Department must submit a report summarizing:
  - Expenditures
  - Administrative costs
  - Aggregate program data
  - Policy recommendations

## 7. Effective Date

- The Act takes effect **45 days after becoming law**.

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# Maryland State Child Care Association

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## **Caring For Maryland's Most Important Natural Resource™**

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*The Maryland State Child Care Association (MSCCA) is a non-profit, statewide, professional association incorporated in 1984 to promote the growth and development of child care and learning centers in Maryland. MSCCA has over five thousand members working in the field of child care/early childhood education. We believe children are our most important natural resource and work hard to advocate for children, families and for professionalism within the early childhood community.*

### **Testimony**

**March 19, 2026**

**Re: Early Learning in Baltimore City – Access, Fiscal Sustainability, and Accountability  
Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Council:**

**Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony to support *First Steps, Strong Start: Early Learning in Baltimore City*. This hearing addresses an issue that sits at the heart of Maryland's long-term economic and social well-being: ensuring that every young child—regardless of ZIP code—has access to high-quality early learning.**

### **Why Early Learning in Baltimore City Matters**

**Baltimore City's children deserve the same strong start as children anywhere in Maryland. Yet persistent gaps in access, affordability, and program stability continue to limit opportunities for families. Research is unequivocal: high-quality early learning improves school readiness, strengthens long-term academic outcomes, reduces special education placements, and supports family economic mobility.**

**The Blueprint for Maryland's Future recognizes this by requiring a mixed-delivery prekindergarten system for 3- and 4-year-olds. But the promise of the Blueprint can only be realized if the system is adequately funded, equitably structured, and accountable to the children it serves.**

### **Gaps in Access**

**Baltimore City faces unique challenges:**

- **Insufficient seats for 3-year-olds and uneven availability for 4-year-olds across neighborhoods.**
- **Limited transportation options, which disproportionately affect low-income families.**
- **Barriers for community-based providers—including licensing, facility costs, and workforce shortages—that prevent them from fully participating in the mixed-delivery system.**

**These gaps mean that too many children miss the critical window when brain development is most rapid and most responsive to high-quality learning environments.**

### **Fiscal Sustainability**

**A mixed-delivery system only works when community-based providers can survive financially. Today, many cannot.**

- **Providers report thin margins that make it difficult to recruit and retain qualified educators.**
- **Rising costs—facilities, materials, compliance—are not matched by stable, predictable funding streams.**
- **Without sustainable reimbursement rates, the system risks losing exactly the providers the Blueprint depends on.**

**Strengthening fiscal sustainability is not optional; it is foundational to the Blueprint's success.**

### **Accountability and Quality**

**Accountability structures must ensure that:**

- **Head Start programs remain strong, well-supported, and aligned with state expectations.**
- **Mixed-delivery partners meet high standards without being burdened by duplicative or inconsistent oversight.**
- **Families have transparent information about program quality, availability, and enrollment processes.**

**Accountability should be rigorous, but it must also be coherent and supportive, especially for smaller community-based organizations that serve families with the greatest needs.**

#### **Why This Hearing Matters**

**This hearing is an opportunity to:**

- **Identify structural barriers that prevent equitable access.**
- **Strengthen the financial foundation of early learning providers.**
- **Ensure that accountability systems promote quality without undermining participation.**
- **Reaffirm Maryland's commitment to the Blueprint's vision for universal, high-quality early learning.**

**Baltimore City's children cannot wait. Every year without action is a year of lost potential. MSCCA respectfully urges support for solutions shared for moving forward with *First Steps, Strong Start: Early Learning in Baltimore City* and to advance policies that expand access, stabilize funding, and strengthen accountability across the early learning system. Maryland has already set an ambitious vision. Now we must ensure that Baltimore City's children and the providers who serve them have the resources and support needed to make that vision real.**

**Thank you for your leadership!**

# **PreK Expansion and the Private Child Care Market:**

Evidence, Implications, and Recommendations for the Baltimore City Council

Part 1: Executive Summary

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Prepared by: Family Child Care Alliance of Maryland

March 18, 2026

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## **Executive Summary**

This brief examines a pattern documented across multiple states: when public PreK expands, private child care providers can lose enrollment, and the consequences extend well beyond the families directly affected. In Maryland, where the Blueprint for Maryland's Future is driving rapid PreK expansion through a mixed-delivery model, understanding these dynamics is essential to the Blueprint's success and a healthy child care ecosystem.

## **The Mixed-Delivery Mandate**

Maryland's Blueprint distributes PreK seats across public school classrooms, licensed child care centers, family child care (FCC) homes, Head Start programs, and Letter of Compliance facilities. The Family Child Care Alliance's ASPIRE PreK program has been the primary vehicle for FCC expansion, and by fall 2026 will have established 117 FCC PreK programs statewide.

Private provider participation in Maryland's mixed-delivery system for PreK is a fairly recent development. Prior to 2020, only a handful of centers and Letter of Compliance facilities participated across the state, and in the 2019-20 school year there were no FCC providers participating at all. Many families remain unaware that they can access publicly funded PreK through a licensed family child care home or private child care center in their own neighborhood.

In January 2025, Joint Statement #3 from the State Board of Education and the Accountability and Implementation Board changed the direction of mixed-delivery expansion. The statement encouraged LEAs to focus PreK expansion on low-income four-year-olds and directed private providers to shift their focus toward three-year-olds. This shift has significant financial implications for providers who depend on revenue from PreK-aged children to sustain their programs.

## **The Core Problem: Cross-Subsidization**

Private child care operates on a cross-subsidization model: the relatively lower cost and higher margin of serving three- and four-year-olds helps offset the substantially higher cost of serving infants and toddlers. Mandatory low child-to-staff ratios, specialized training requirements, intensive caregiving demands, greater physical space requirements (including cribs and specialized equipment), and separate infant care licensing for centers, all drive per-child costs for infants significantly higher than for preschool-aged children.

The U.S. Department of the Treasury's 2021 analysis found that the child care market systematically underprices the true cost of quality care, making public investment essential to sustainability. Research confirmed across multiple states finds that infant-toddler-only care is not financially sustainable at any size or quality level.

When public PreK draws three- and four-year-olds away from private providers, it does not simply reduce enrollment. It removes the revenue that makes infant and toddler care possible. Some families move their children from private providers to publicly funded

programs; others choose to remain in private settings for religious or cultural reasons, or because their children do not qualify for subsidized PreK. But even partial enrollment loss can destabilize a provider's finances.

## Evidence from Multiple States

Research across multiple states documents this pattern consistently:

- Georgia (Berne, 2024): A landmark study using long-run Census data found that 22 percent of children experienced market-driven substitution effects, meaning they moved between care settings not because they enrolled in a new program, but because market disruptions due to PreK expansion rippled through the entire child care ecosystem. Even children who never enrolled in public PreK were affected by closures and enrollment disruptions in the private market.
- Fort Worth, TX (Keany & Leventon, 2014): Forty providers (29 centers and 11 homes) lost 160 four-year-olds to public PreK expansion in a single year, representing \$799,000 in gross annual revenue. This was a 52 percent increase over enrollment losses the prior year, and it captures the impact of just one district's expansion over one year.
- New York State (Sipple et al.): Private child care providers experienced measurable enrollment declines as public PreK expanded, with effects concentrated among providers serving lower-income communities.

## The FCC Dimension

For family child care providers, the financial exposure of children leaving for public PreK is acute. An FCC home licensed for eight children that loses two four-year-olds to public PreK loses 25 percent of its revenue until those seats are filled. Many FCC homes operate below their licensed capacity, making the proportional impact even greater.

The assumption that providers who lose PreK enrollment will universally pivot to serving infants is not supported by the research. The reasons are significant and well-documented: lower ratios, specialized equipment, space constraints, and intensive caregiving demands. Many FCC providers have deliberately limited their programs to children ages two and older. For many, serving PreK-aged children is not just a financial decision; it is the work they prefer. When faced with the prospect of converting their home environment and daily life to accommodate infant care simply to survive financially, some will choose to close instead.

## The Baltimore City Context

Baltimore City Public Schools has built PreK capacity for approximately 4,200 seats. Demographic projections show a 12,000-student decline in K-12 enrollment by 2030, a 15 percent reduction. As PreK cohorts shrink, the district faces institutional pressure to fill its funded seats, creating dynamics that could result in competing for the same four-year-olds that private providers depend on. This is not a criticism of the district; it is a predictable consequence of fixed capacity in a declining enrollment environment.

## Three Recommendations

1. *Start with what you may not know.* Survey child care providers to find out who, with the right supports, would consider offering PreK. Those who say no under any circumstances are at risk: when publicly funded PreK draws away the three- and four-year-olds they depend on, those providers face revenue losses that could force them to close. Also verify what providers' true enrollment actually is. Licensed capacity and actual enrollment are not the same thing, and a provider who looks stable on paper may already be operating at the margin.

2. *Find out what families actually want.* Not every family with a PreK-aged child wants to enroll that child in a PreK program. Some prefer to keep younger children at home. Others have cultural or religious reasons for choosing private settings. Before building capacity around an assumption of universal demand, find out what the actual demand is. Maryland has seen publicly funded PreK classrooms sit empty because projected enrollment did not match reality. Knowing what families actually want, before decisions are made, produces better outcomes for everyone.

3. *Ask families where they want their children enrolled.* Many families remain unaware that publicly funded PreK is available through a licensed family child care home or private child care center in their own neighborhood. Default assumptions that public school is the only or preferred option drive expansion decisions that bypass private providers entirely. Ask families directly and inform them of their options. The answers will shape a more accurate picture of demand and ensure that expansion decisions reflect what families actually want.

## Conclusion

Maryland's Blueprint represents a genuine commitment to early childhood education, one that, if implemented thoughtfully, can strengthen both the quality of PreK programs and the health of the broader child care ecosystem. The evidence from multiple states is consistent: PreK expansion without deliberate protection of the private child care market does not just shift children between settings. It disrupts the cross-subsidy that sustains infant and toddler care, reduces access for children whose families choose or require private care, accelerates an already fragile workforce exodus, and can force provider closures that eliminate far more care than the new programs create.

Note: Full citations will be provided as part of the full research brief at a later date.

**Written Testimony to the Baltimore City Council  
Early Learning in Baltimore City**

Over the last 25 years I have actively engaged in improving Baltimore’s educational and early learning systems. From my years as a First Grade teacher in Park Heights, to my time as Executive Director of Teaching and Learning in Baltimore City Public Schools where I oversaw the Office of Early Learning, and now for the last 10 years leading an organization focused on improving Kindergarten Readiness, I have seen the potential of Baltimore.

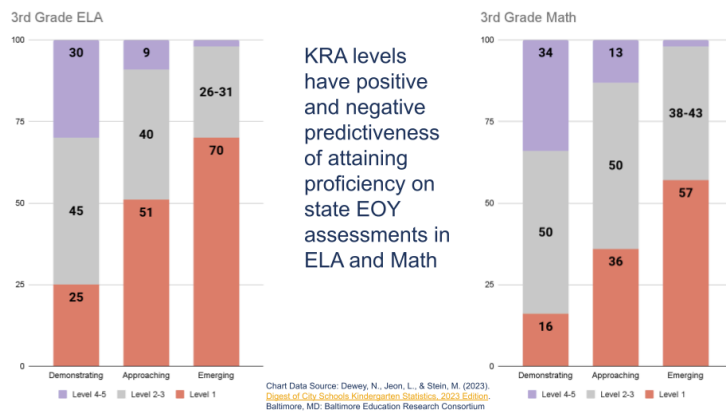
My experiences working across many aspects of our early learning and educational systems has provided me with a unique perspective on our community and what it might take to improve these systems and outcomes at scale. A central question has emerged in my conversations over the past 25 years.

**“What might it take for All Children in Baltimore City to achieve at high levels and be socially and academically prepared for Kindergarten?”**

This question has driven the work of Improving Education, a non-profit I founded in Baltimore with a mission to improve educational outcomes for children at scale. We believe that by investing in quality programming and providing access to resources and materials for families and childcare providers, we can create equitable systems that serve our communities for years to come.

Research conducted by the Baltimore Education Research Consortium (BERC), in their [Kindergarten Success Fact Book 2023](#), shows that Readiness for Kindergarten is predictive of attaining proficiency on the state assessments in 3rd grade Reading and Math. Specifically, students who scored in the lowest category of Readiness for Kindergarten

(Emerging), most often scored at level 1 for Literacy and Math in 3rd grade, whereas those who scored at the highest levels often scored much higher on the state assessments.



BERC also found that students who demonstrate readiness on the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA) have a 92% likelihood of being on grade level in Kindergarten by the end of the year, compared to just 33% of students who score in the “emerging” category for Readiness. Generally, students who are ready for Kindergarten are able to more effectively access the curriculum and instruction in Baltimore City classrooms and perform at higher levels academically.

**It is clear in this data that quality early childhood experiences establish the trajectory of future performance.**

Baltimore City must focus not only on the expansion of seats for our youngest learners, but also on the quality of those seats to improve outcomes at scale.

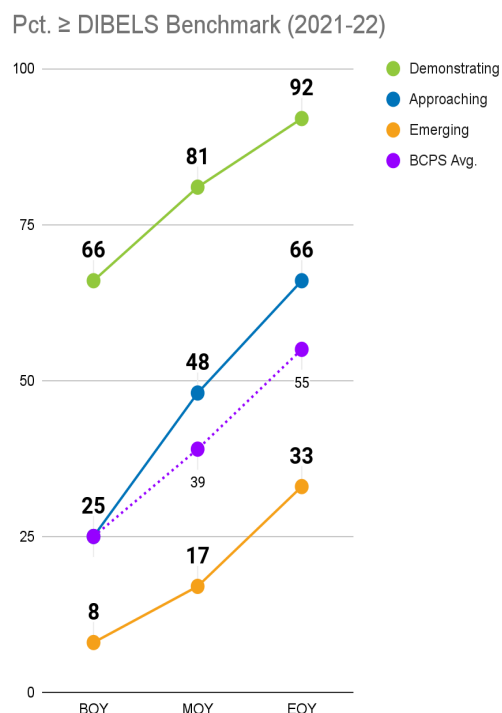


Chart Data Source: Dewey, N., Jeon, L., & Stein, M. (2023). [Digest of City Schools Kindergarten Statistics, 2023 Edition](#). Baltimore, MD: Baltimore Education Research Consortium

Kindergarten Readiness in Baltimore is now at 45%. This number is a significant increase from 23% of students meeting expectations during the 21-22 school year, after the COVID-19 pandemic. This number shows it is possible for students in Baltimore to perform at high levels, however this number means that over half of our youngest learners are entering Kindergarten not ready to thrive in our current system.

I’d like to acknowledge the Baltimore City Early Care and Education Landscape Analysis commissioned by the Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC). This report clearly shows the obstacles and opportunities as well as recommendations for action. Three recommendations resonate with our work and our capacity to support improvements.

1. Commit to building a universal system of high-quality early care and education for all Baltimore children from birth to age five.
2. Maximize enrollment in publicly funded programs.
3. Improve data collection, reporting and availability.



At Improving Education, we believe that having a seat in the classroom is just the first step to closing the equity gap and creating meaningful change. We must ensure that all programs are consistently providing high-quality instruction for all students. State-level Kindergarten Readiness data highlights the large amount of variation that currently exists among local educational agencies (LEAs). Naming and understanding this variation provides us with an opportunity to dig deeper to better understand the services being provided for our young learners and assess the quality of those services.

Through our work, we have learned that All Children Ready should be our goal. Since 2021, we have invested in learning alongside providers through our All Children Ready initiative to develop a model that focuses on quality instruction and improves Kindergarten Readiness. Our partners have included: Head Start, public schools in Baltimore City, and state-funded mixed delivery sites.

This year we are supporting over 1,700 students in Baltimore and have developed a model that is improving quality through coaching, using data to drive instructional improvements, and supporting families with materials and resources to improve health and learning. We recognize how critical the school-to-home connection is. All students we serve receive Bedtime in a Box and Learning in a Box, which we have designed as a scalable, universal initiative. These Boxes are more than just resources, they are carefully curated with materials to support families in creating healthy routines connected to bedtime and practicing literacy and math skills at home.

Next year we plan to work with 3,000 students (age 3 and 4) in Baltimore City and are committing over \$1,000,000 in funding from private sources to address improvements in quality and Kindergarten Readiness. Our goal is for 80% of students served to meet or exceed Kindergarten Readiness expectations. This represents a large investment in collaboration with partners and improved quality that can sustain in the future.

As we work to expand access to programming we must also ensure that the quality of programming remains a top priority within Baltimore City. Providing high-quality programming in the earliest years helps to ensure that children are able to access the opportunities and achieve throughout their academic career. The City Council has an opportunity to invest in quality and promote enrollment as we expand seats for children. Baltimore is also poised at an inflection point that can change the trajectory of our youngest residents and ensure improved outcomes for years to come. We are ready to support improvements in our current system and build a universal system of high-quality early care and education for all Baltimore children from birth to age five.