



BALTIMORE CITY COUNCIL EDUCATION, YOUTH, & OLDER ADULT 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

January 29, 2026

12:30 PM

CLARENCE "DU" BURNS COUNCIL CHAMBERS

Bill: LO25-0039

*Title: First Steps, Strong Start: Childcare in
Baltimore City*

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EDUCATION, YOUTH, & OLDER ADULTS COMMITTEE

The Honorable John Bullock
CHAIR

Legislative Oversight Hearing

Bill: LO25-0039

Title: First Steps, Strong Start: Childcare in Baltimore City

For purpose of investigating the childcare landscape in Baltimore City, with a focus on accessibility for families, capacity and quality for providers, and affordability for all involved.

BACKGROUND

The legislative oversight hearing is focused on investigating the childcare landscape in Baltimore City, with attention to accessibility for families, capacity and quality for providers, and affordability for all involved. According to the [2025 Baltimore City Exceptional Children's Assistance Center Landscape Analysis](#), Baltimore City has 382 licensed family care programs and 283 licensed centers, including Head Start and Early Head Start programs. Other forms of early childhood education in the City include nursery schools, public and private pre-K classrooms, and family-based childcare programs operating in homes.

[Baltimore City](#) has 18,258 licensed childcare slots for 37,232 children ages 0 to 5, with only 1,500 slots for 7,447 infants under [12 months](#). Between 2019 and 2024, center-based care lost 1,665 seats, representing an 11 percent decrease, and family-based programs decreased by 111 programs, representing a 23 percent decrease, resulting in a net loss of 780 slots, or [21 percent](#). Neighborhoods with lower estimated coverage include Curtis Bay, Morrell Park, Cherry Hill, Westport, Canton, Patterson Park, Oldtown, Federal Hill, Midway/Coldstream, Cheswolde, Walbrook, Forest Park, Penn North, Reservoir Hill, and [Greater Lauraville](#).

Childcare costs in Baltimore City have steadily increased over the past 25 years. Based on the [Maryland Market Rate Survey](#) and [Narrow Cost Analysis](#) released in 2024, Baltimore City ranks as the eighth most expensive city for childcare in Maryland. Family-based care is generally less expensive than center-based care. Between 2020 and 2023, the [cost of childcare](#) in Maryland increased between

13.5 percent and 35 percent. [National comparisons](#) show higher costs on the East and West coasts, including Washington, D.C., Boston, and New York City, while cities such as Detroit and Chicago report lower costs. Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and Richmond have costs roughly comparable to Baltimore City.

Federal guidance suggests families should spend no more than 7 percent of their annual income on childcare. The median family income in Baltimore City is \$72,972, which corresponds to a recommended [annual childcare expenditure](#) of \$5,108. In practice, families in the City spend substantially more than this amount. Family costs include payments for caregivers, food, insurance, transportation, clothing, and educational materials, [with infant care being the most expensive](#). Providers face additional costs for supplies, food, educational materials, staff wages, facility expenses, and compliance with licensing and regulatory programs such as Maryland EXCELS and the Maryland Child Care Scholarship [Program](#).

Maryland EXCELS is an optional quality rating system that evaluates programs on licensing compliance, staff qualifications, professional development, accreditation, teacher-child interactions, developmentally appropriate practices, and communication with [families](#). Programs can earn additional recognition for completing specific programs or documentation, including participation in the Governor's Office for Children and Families. In [Baltimore City](#), 75 percent of family-based programs and 70 percent of center-based programs are below Level 3 or do not participate in EXCELS, while Level 4 and 5 programs are concentrated in districts surrounding the [City](#).

Programs supporting families and providers include the [Baltimore Young Families Success Fund](#), a two-year program providing cash assistance to young parents and caregivers at or below 300 percent of the federal poverty level. [The Maryland Child Care Scholarship Program](#), funded at 500 million dollars for fiscal years 2024 and 2025, temporarily increased eligibility to 75 percent of the median income, waived co-payments, and provided short-term scholarships while families awaited application approval. United Way of Central Maryland operates [family stability programs](#) and [neighborhood-based centers](#) offering wraparound services and free full-day childcare.

Provider supports include the Growing Opportunities for Family Child Care ([GOFCC](#)) program, administered through the Baltimore City Child Care Resource Center in partnership with [Family Tree](#), [Maryland Family Network](#), and other nonprofit organizations. The program provides training, coaching, mentorship, assistance with state documentation, and resources to establish family

childcare businesses, including laptops, printers, and curriculum materials. Family Tree also supports providers seeking EXCELS accreditation and higher quality ratings.

FISCAL NOTE

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