

Senate Bill 359 - Therapeutic Child Care Grant Program – Funding - Alterations

Senate Budget and Taxation Committee

January 29, 2025

Position: SUPPORT

Mental Health Association of Maryland (MHAMD) is a nonprofit education and advocacy organization that brings together consumers, families, clinicians, advocates and concerned citizens for unified action in all aspects of mental health and substance use disorders (collectively referred to as behavioral health). We appreciate the opportunity to provide this testimony in support of SB 359.

SB 359 would extend the Therapeutic Childcare Grant Program, which the legislature established in 2022, past the FY25 sunset date in the original legislation, and sets it to resume in FY27. MHAMD strongly supports the continuation of the Grant Program.

It is not uncommon for very young children with social, emotional or behavioral challenges to be expelled from childcare settings. Young children are expelled at three times the rate of children in kindergarten through 12th grade.¹ Social/emotional/behavioral challenges among very young children are often the result of trauma, which can be linked to poverty. Expulsion of young children disproportionately affects children of color, males, children with disabilities, and those who are socioeconomically disadvantaged.² It can negatively impact a child's development and have lifetime consequences. Additionally, it puts tremendous burden on parents/caregivers.

Therapeutic childcare centers are one way to address the problem. By partnering with parents/caregivers to support the social-emotional development of children, helping them learn to manage behaviors, and addressing childhood trauma with evidence-based therapeutic interventions, therapeutic childcare centers can improve the trajectory of a child's life. One study of a therapeutic childcare center in Maryland that supported children with social/emotional/behavioral challenges found that 80% of children successfully transitioned to a regular kindergarten classroom setting.³

¹ National Center on Early Childhood Health and Wellness. Understanding and eliminating expulsion in early childhood programs. Accessed January 25, 2024.

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/publication/understanding-eliminating-expulsion-early-childhood-programs>

² Williams, P. and Yogman, M. Addressing early education and childcare expulsion. The American Academy of Pediatrics Policy Statement. October 2023. Accessed January 25, 2024.

<https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article/152/5/e2023064049/194508/Addressing-Early-Education-and-Child-Care?autologincheck=redirected>

³ Yair, Z. et al. Changing developmental trajectory in high-risk families: the effectiveness of an attachment-informed Therapeutic Nursery Program for preschool children with complex emotional and behavioral problems. Attachment and Human Development. Vol 23 (3). 2021. Accessed January 25, 2024.

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14616734.2020.1722717?scroll=top&needAccess=true>

Prior to the passage of SB 506 in the 2022 legislative session, which established the Therapeutic Childcare Grant Program, therapeutic childcare centers were funded with a patchwork of federal and state funds that were undependable. By establishing a stable grant program, the legislature provided for the fiscal stability of these important centers.

For these reasons MHAMD supports SB 359 and urges a favorable report.