

SENATOR JUSTIN READY



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THE MARYLAND GENERAL ASSEMBLY
LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT 5
CARROLL COUNTY

August 15, 2020

Sent Via Electronic Communication

Dr. Karen B. Salmon
State Superintendent of Schools
Maryland Department of Education
Nancy S. Grasmick State Education Building
200 West Baltimore Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21201

Re: Increasing Childcare Centers Capacity

Dear Dr. Salmon,

First, thank you for addressing our Carroll County Delegation Childcare letter, sent to you on June 10, 2020, requesting a boost in the capacity of child care centers in Maryland - at that time you increased the numbers to 15 individuals in a classroom, which includes adults. That incremental move back to previous levels was critical and appreciated by the families that are using these centers along with the proprietors who are trying to stay in business during this pandemic. Unfortunately, since then, many centers have closed their doors or are in financial distress due to the continued limitations on capacity along with costly new safety measures that have been implemented.

With all of the uncertainty revolving around the reopening of schools, families are in constant turmoil over planning for child care as they are returning to work. We are receiving a large volume of communications from families who are pleading with us for the State Superintendent and the State Board of Education to provide a *viable* path forward to reopen schools and return to normal capacity for child care centers. **We ask that you remove the limitations on capacity of children in child care facilities and reinstate COMAR numbers.**

Childcare centers have been extremely successful in keeping children safe throughout the crisis and have offered needed care for tens of thousands of children of essential personnel. These centers are already highly regulated, controlled environments that have always been subject to stringent health guidelines and practices. Child care centers have jumped through every hoop that

has been asked of them and developed comprehensive plans for opening schools safely to protect students and staff, including CDC-recommended protocols such as symptom screenings, restrictions on building access, the wearing of personal protective equipment and thorough cleaning and sanitizing.

Families are desperate for quality child care and are now forced to use unlicensed and illegal care so that they can return to work to provide for their families. **Capacity limitations, if allowed to continue, threaten the very existence of Maryland's childcare facilities and further economic strain that has resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic.**

Child care is an economic driver and foundation for working families. Marylanders cannot get back to work without adequate child care. **Since the caps were placed on child care centers throughout the state, the science on the transmission of COVID-19 has changed considerably. Risks to children from the coronavirus are extremely small, especially relative to other risks.** We also know that there is little known risk to adults from children.

The Foundation for Research on Equal Opportunity projects that children under 15 are 6.83 to 20.07 times more likely to die of the flu or pneumonia than coronavirus and 128 times more likely to die of an accident. No one wants to endanger children, but the risks to children are not enough to justify the continuing destruction of lockdowns and limits on child care for our families. As for the transmission of the virus to teachers - Australia's *National Centre for Immunization Research and Surveillance* tracked COVID-19 cases in their schools and found that there were no cases of students passing the virus to teachers.

Now that jurisdictions are making final decisions on delivery of public school learning and the fall semester quickly approaching, parents are finding less access to child care. Many families, including those of teachers, are finding it difficult to work effectively with their own small children underfoot and those essential workers who must work outside of the home are competing for the same limited child care spots.

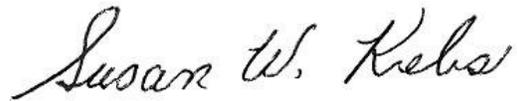
The COVID-19 guidelines for child care programs are making doing business even more expensive on top of the limits on capacity. More than half of child care providers in Maryland said that they may have to close their operations due to financial losses and restrictions from the COVID-19 pandemic. Even prior to the pandemic, many families struggled to find affordable child care and now they are in an even worse situation. *The unintended consequences to this will force parents to use unsafe, unfamiliar and unregulated child care.* How will our parents go back to work without the infrastructure available to care for their children?

We realize that returning to Maryland's thoughtfully considered COMAR limitations would still require each child care facility to follow reasonable and rigorous health and safety guidance. Thank you for your consideration as we look forward to working with you and the administration as we move forward.

Sincerely,



Senator Justin Ready



Delegate Susan Krebs



Delegate April Rose



Delegate Haven Shoemaker

CC: Tiffany Clark, Deputy Director, Government Relations, MSDE
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