



## **TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS**

### **HB 1261 Commission on Access to High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Child Care for Children Three Years and Younger**

**POSITION: Support**

**BY: Linda Kohn, President, League of Women Voters of Maryland**

**DATE: February 28, 2024**

The League of Women Voters of Maryland is a nonpartisan organization that works to increase understanding of major public policy issues and influence public policy through education and advocacy. The League believes that some of the goals of social policy should be to secure equal rights and equal opportunity for all. The League believes that meeting the needs of children should be one of the highest priorities of government, as should be the provision of effective services for children – emphasizing collaborative, community based, accessible services that focus on early intervention. The development, care, and education of young children is not only of concern to the League, but to all Marylanders because of the profound impact of these years throughout the life span.

A wide body of research tells us that the early years are critical in brain development and the unfolding of human behavior. From birth through age five development happens at a pace exceeding that of any other stage of life. All facets of this development, including its pace, are strongly influenced by the social and economic circumstances of each child. Science now recognizes that genetic and environmental influences work together in human development. A child's social and economic circumstances can be predictive of later academic performance, as well as physical and mental health, and successful healthy and productive adulthood. Research also tells us that every \$1 invested in early childhood brings an average return of \$7, ensuring that dollars invested in early childhood are dollars well spent.

The Maryland Family Network reports that early childhood experiences vary greatly across the State of Maryland in terms of quality and availability, and overall the costs are a burden on Maryland families. Child care is one of the top three household expenses statewide; in some communities it is the top household expense, more than housing. Public funding for early childhood experiences have thus far failed to meet the need for such services, and a great many children fall through the gap. Programs for 3 and 4 year olds, such as Universal Pre-K and Head Start, don't have enough open slots to accommodate every Maryland child who qualifies. For those younger than three, the need is even greater.

HB1261 will establish the Commission on Access to High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Child Care for children three years old and younger. The Commission will be comprised of representatives from a broad range of stakeholders in the early childhood arena, including education, labor, workforce, a range of child care providers and early childhood educators, parents, business, and government. The Commission will study implementing access to high-quality early education and child care for Maryland's children three and under and issue a report with recommendations to the Governor by October 1, 2025.

The League of Women Voters of Maryland, representing over 1,000 concerned Maryland citizens, strongly urges a favorable report on HB1261.