



10109 Darnestown Road
Rockville, MD 20850
(301) 424-6282

www.academychild.com | academychild@gmail.com



September 25, 2020

Testimony from Academy Child Development Center, Inc. (Academy) regarding:

Special Appropriation to the Fiscal Year 2021 Operating Budget, Montgomery County Government, Early Care and Education Non-Departmental Account, COVID-19 School-Age Child Care During Distance Learning, \$7,687,000 (Source of Funds: Federal Grant Funds)

- On behalf of Academy Child Development Center, Inc., we extend our gratitude to the staff, and work groups within the Montgomery County Government, especially Community Use of Public Facilities (CUPF), as well as the Members of the County Council for their time, support, and collaboration.
- Montgomery County's investment of public funds through the Special Appropriation for COVID-19 School-Age Child Care Distance Learning is commendable and a positive step in the right direction.
- Pre-COVID-19, Academy's five School-Age programs were at 90% capacity. Currently, we have a total of 16 school-age children from those 5 locations in space that is not leased within in an MCPS building. Since MCPS buildings would not be available until September 14, 2020, Academy, and several other Coalition Partners utilized alternate locations for School-Age Distance Learning Hubs, to be able to support families and their children beginning August 31, 2020.
- Through virtual meetings, Members of the Montgomery County School-Age Coalition partnered with CUPF, MCPS, and representatives from various Montgomery County Government agencies to share how the COVID-19 pandemic has economically devastated our programs. Our businesses are tuition dependent and rely on families to pay tuition for our programs to operate. Approximately, 80% of a program's operating budget is allotted to payroll expenses.
- Members of the Montgomery County School-Age Coalition was pleased to partner with CUPF, and MCPS, to share our strategies on safely reopening licensed school-age childcare in public space. The coalition respectfully submitted its collaborative document *MSDE School Based Child Care Policies & Procedures (July 24, 2020)*, to demonstrate our collective commitment to ensure the health, safety, and well-being of the staff, children, and families in our programs.
- The State's requirement for reopening childcare include smaller group sizes up of 14 children to 1 staff member, for a total group capacity of 15 people. Despite the increased staffing cost, Coalition Members committed to assigning 2 staff members for 13 children per cohort to ensure ongoing compliance with the strictly established enhanced health and safety standards.
- To be able to afford to reopen a classroom at the 4 schools we lease space through CUPF, Academy would need 13 children per classroom to cover staffing costs, and rental fees. Families that are currently enrolled at our one hub, would like to return to their child's home school when possible. Unfortunately, the "home school lists" we started for each site averages 7 children per site.
- As a member of the Montgomery County School-Age Coalition who actively engaged in the development of "School-Age Distance Learning Hubs," I was one of four coalition members to represent providers in a small work group, facilitated by Mary E.L. Gies, LMSW Legislative Senior Aide to Council President Sidney Katz. The small work group met virtually at the beginning of August to discuss the impact of the school system's decision to offer all virtual learning through January 29, 2021. Working families who were unable to work remotely, licensed school-age providers, and their need for high quality, dependable childcare, as well as the continuous economic injury that licensed school-age providers are experiencing as a result of the long term closure of MCPS.
- The discussion in the small work group was focused on using the County's Early Care and Education Initiative (ECEI) Recovery Fund as a guide in the development for funding for School-Age Programs. The ECEI Recovery Fund took pre-pandemic enrollment into consideration versus current enrollment,



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as part of the determining factors. Coalition members, including Academy were extremely grateful to be awarded ECEI Recovery Funds. Those funds helped us reopen, however, the income from school-age programs helps keep the costs affordable for the Early Childhood Programs.

- Childcare is essential for Montgomery County's economic recovery. The following are examples of how the lack of access to leased space has impacted licensed school-age providers:
 - The closure of space leased within MCPS buildings for licensed school-age programs that began on March 16, 2020 up until September 14, 2020.
 - The length of the closure and ongoing uncertainty forced parents to make other arrangements for their children, whether it was family, neighbors, another licensed program not in public space, or unlicensed facilities.
 - Decision by MCPS to offer an all virtual learning model through January 29, 2021 and how it affected the decisions that working parents made according to Academy's most recent survey.
 - In the most recent parent survey to Academy school-age families, one of the questions was, **"What can we do to make you feel more comfortable with bringing your child back to our facility?"** Many of the responses included: 1. When MCPS returns to some form of in person learning. 2. When a COVID-19 vaccine is available.
 - Extremely low enrollment in the majority of the coalition's School-Age Distance Learning Hubs offered by providers whether they have reopened within leased space in MCPS buildings.
 - Retain the qualified school-age staff currently overseeing these programs. When MCPS returns to some form of in person learning, providers will need staff for their school-age programs to meet the needs of working families, many of whom are MCPS teachers.
 - Increased operating costs due to smaller group size, low enrollment, enhanced health, and safety protocols.
 - Without significant public investment in licensed, high-quality school-age child care programs in Montgomery County, a large percentage of providers who have faithfully served our community for more than 20, 30, 40 and 50 years will be unable to keep their doors open.
 - The childcare workforce is comprised predominately of women, many with black and brown skin. If childcare does not receive an increase in funding, and programs in Montgomery County are forced to close forever, there will be a large percentage of individuals with specific qualifications and skills left unemployed.
 - School-Age needs reopening funds, greater than \$19,500 per classroom to remain sustainable.

To ensure that high-quality, licensed school-age child care survives the 2020-2021 school year, and is available to serve working families and children in Montgomery following the all virtual learning model, we respectfully request that the County Council amend the requirements and increase the allocation of the COVID-19 School-Age Child Care Distance Learning reopening grants.

Respectfully submitted,

Lesley Everhart
Chief Executive Director