



We improve the lives and experiences of Maryland's children and youth by advancing policies and programs that tackle disparities and close equity gaps to ensure that there is an opportunity for all our most vulnerable to thrive.

**Testimony before the House Appropriations Committee
Education and Economic Development Subcommittee**

In SUPPORT of MSDE's Early Childhood Development Budget

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Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on MSDE's Early Childhood Development Budget. **For us to improve outcomes for young children across Maryland, we need to fully fund programs provided for young children through MSDE.**

While we respect the importance of all of the programs included in MSDE's Early Childhood Development Budget, of particular concern to ACY is Maryland's Infants and Toddlers program. Infants and Toddlers exists to provide services to all children ages birth through two, who have cognitive delays; physical delays, including vision and hearing; communication delays; social or emotional delays; or adaptive delays. Services are provided to these families irrespective of income.

Infants and Toddlers is included in MSDE's budget, but also includes federal funds through Part C of the Individual with Disabilities Education Act, and local funds that each county contributes to the program. Advocates for Children and Youth suggests that if changes were made to the current funding scheme, it would better meet the needs of Maryland's most vulnerable children. Right now, the funding is based solely on the number of children in each jurisdiction without any consideration of healthy disparities or the number of children living in poverty in that jurisdiction. It is well documented that living in poverty, and experiencing the toxic stress that accompanies that lifestyle, impedes brain development in children.¹ It follows that in jurisdictions with higher rates of child poverty would have higher rates of children with delays and children eligible for services through Infants and Toddlers. The issue of adequate funding is especially acute in jurisdictions where the local contribution is insufficient because the bulk of the funding in most counties is the local contribution.

Advocates for Children and Youth fully supports MSDE's Early Childhood budget, but urges this committee to consider shifting the Infants and Toddlers funding structure to better meet the needs of Maryland's youngest children.

¹ "Toxic stress response can occur when a child experiences strong, frequent, and/or prolonged adversity—such as ... the accumulated burdens of family economic hardship—without adequate adult support. This kind of prolonged activation of the stress response systems can disrupt the development of brain architecture and other organ systems, and increase the risk for stress-related disease and cognitive impairment, well into the adult years."
<https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/toxic-stress/>