



2026 Legislative Session

Wrap Up

April 2026

For questions or to learn more about MFN's
advocacy efforts email

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ACCESS TO QUALITY EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION

CHILD CARE SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

When Session began, the Child Care Scholarship Program (CCSP) waitlist was front of mind for Maryland Family Network (MFN) and House leaders. At a House briefing in early February, Maryland Family Network (MFN) testified on the impact the enrollment freeze is having on communities across the state. At the time, 5,113 children were on the CCSP waitlist. Advocates are aware of families who have been deterred from applying for CCSP because of the waitlist, and speak of the need for child care access being even greater than the number reflected in the waitlist quarterly reports.

The Maryland General Assembly took three steps to address the Child Care Scholarship Program waitlist. First, the House and Senate **added an additional \$20 Million to the Governor's allocation for the Child Care Scholarship Program**. Second, two pieces of legislation to guide the Maryland State Department of Education's management of the waitlist passed (HB 849 and HB 1321). Families receiving Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA) or Social Security Income (SSI), siblings of current Scholarship recipients, and children experiencing homelessness will be exempt from the waitlist. When they apply and are deemed eligible, they will receive a Scholarship. **The waitlist will be in place until additional funding becomes available.** If and when a spot opens up, children from the lowest income families would be served first, children of child care providers next, followed by children under three, and those on the waitlist for the longest period of time.



Annapolis Day 2026 brought advocates from all over the state to thank legislators for their support.

The third step-- described to advocates as a step towards serving more families-- will have certain scholarship recipients contribute a family copayment. **Families living below the Federal Poverty Line would be exempt from paying a copayment.** The copayment structure is progressive, tiered, and capped at seven percent of a family's income per child. The Department is required to give notice to families before implementing copayments and must make applicants aware of other potential supports. With the additional funds generated by the family contribution, the Administration estimates that some of the families currently on the waitlist would be able to receive a Scholarship.

An **additional \$1M was included in the budget for CCSP information technology (IT)** needs, below the amount that was requested to support an aging IT infrastructure that is often frustrating to providers.

The additional \$20 Million over and above the original FY 2027 allocation included in the Governor's sustained historic investment is a sign of the continued recognition of the importance of child care for constituents across the state. MFN will continue to closely monitor the coming changes to CCSP and advocate for families who are unable to access

affordable child care and for child care providers who desire a well-functioning reimbursement system.

GROWING OPPORTUNITIES FOR FAMILY CHILD CARE

Maryland Family Network's popular and successful child care supply building program, delivered in partnership with the Child Care Resource Network, **secured \$450,000 in Fiscal Year (FY) 2027**. Legislation passed mandating the \$450,000 appropriation continue through FY 2030 (HB 742 / SB 503). At the hearings, MFN proudly shared that from 2022 through the end of 2025, the program has opened 278 new family child care programs for a total of **1,957 new slots**. Of note, **443 of the new slots that have opened were for infants and toddlers**. Ninety-three percent of GO FCC providers are still in business.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS

Advocacy by child care providers and MFN led to the extension of funding for the Maryland Child Care Credential Program. House and Senate leaders reinstated funding for FY 2027 and passed legislation mandating **\$5.687 Million in funding through FY 2030** (HB 561 / SB 467). Legislation was also passed to ensure a variety of career pathways remain in the early childhood career ladder and set new timelines for staff to meet required qualifications after being hired to work in child care programs (HB 748).

The General Assembly requested a report on the Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Support Services program. Data will meaningfully inform advocacy efforts to increase investments in this critical work that supports young children, their families, and early educators.

PREKINDERGARTEN

The only path for community-based child care providers to participate in the provision of public prekindergarten is through the Pre-K Expansion Grant. The Pre-K Expansion Grant fund has been flat funded for six years, effectively limiting the number of children who can access prekindergarten in child care settings. **The General Assembly added an additional \$10 Million for pre-k expansion grants**. This additional investment is even more critical as it comes alongside an increase in the per-pupil funding amount that, while supporting the provision of quality care, would have further limited the number of children served.



Parents from MFN's Patty Centers and Early Head Start Centers gather to tell their stories.

Under a cloud of budget concern, advocates' efforts to permanently include English language learners and children with disabilities in Tier 1 failed, and the General Assembly capped expansion of funding for full-day pre-k to families at 450% of the Federal Poverty Level. MFN will continue to advocate for increased access to public prekindergarten in a variety of settings and anticipates interim conversations around the Blueprint's outcomes to date and opportunities to best serve Maryland's children in the future.

MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTH AND SAFETY

CHILD SAFETY

MFN supported legislation to improve the child care provider background check process. **The Office of Child Care may now create a centralized unit to handle the important work of ensuring people working in child care programs have been properly background checked and fingerprinted.** Centralization is intended to increase efficiencies and take a burden off of local licensing office staff, which will offer them more time to work in support of the provision of quality child care in their regions (HB 635 / SB 359). A separate Administration bill ensures Maryland is in compliance with Federal background check laws (HB 281). And a third will enable the disclosure of findings of child abuse and neglect among various entities that work directly with children in an effort to keep children safe (SB 447 / HB 1326).

MATERNAL HEALTH

MFN supported legislation to mandate the coverage of screenings for perinatal behavioral health conditions. The bill passed and is awaiting the Governor's signature. **Health care providers who are involved in pregnancy and postpartum care must conduct a screening for perinatal behavioral health conditions at well visits within the first year of the child's life.** The Maryland Department of Health will develop training programs to improve the early identification of perinatal mood and anxiety disorders and identify acceptable screening tools (HB 1118).

The Maternal & Child Health Population Health Improvement Fund remains intact. There was a proposed provision in the Budget Reconciliation and Financing Act that the General Assembly struck that would have allowed \$6.7 million to be transferred to the General Fund. They did not accept that BRFA amendment. As such, **the fund at the beginning of FY 2027 will have \$9.7 million in it, which must be spent by the end of 2027.** For FY 2027, it is budgeted that money will be spent as follows: \$8 million to Medicaid to address severe maternal morbidity and \$1.3 million to the Maryland Department of Health Prevention and Health Promotion Administration to support childhood asthma initiatives and additional maternal morbidity interventions. The money in Medicaid – according to DLS – in past Fiscal Years has supported the Home Visiting Services Pilot, reimbursement for doula services, Centering Pregnancy, HealthySteps, and expansion of the Maternal Opioid Misuse model.

HOME VISITING

MFN and the Maryland Department of Health led the Workgroup on Newborn Home Visiting Services and submitted a final report to the General Assembly in January. Strategic direction setting with the Maryland Department of Health, the Governor's Office for Children, and key legislative leaders is ongoing.



Maryland State Comptroller, Brooke Lierman, addresses advocates at MFN's 2026 Day in Annapolis.

FAMILY ECONOMIC SUPPORTS

ENSURE ACCESS TO SAFETY-NET PROGRAMS THAT SUPPORT LOW-INCOME FAMILIES

In partnership with key allies, **MFN successfully advocated for a proposal to ensure access to Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA) for parents who need “Good Cause” exemptions to starting a child support order against a non-custodial parent to maintain their or their child's safety and wellbeing.** Additionally, in coalition with other organizations, MFN worked to **secure a necessary budget increase to the Community Schools Rental Assistance Program (CSRAP) in FY 2027, as well as continued funding for Medicaid navigators** that will assist families in accessing Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP).

MFN supported legislation to enable local jurisdictions to provide direct financial support to families. Modeled to complement the state's Child Tax Credit, **this law enables jurisdictions to provide their own financial support to low-income families with children, up to \$500 per child.** (SB 468 / HB 363)



Father and son enjoy lunch and conversation together at MFN's 2026 Day in Annapolis.

GROWING OUR CAPACITY FOR ADVOCACY

MFN'S ANNAPOLIS DAY

MFN took steps to grow our community's capacity for advocacy and center the experiences and voices of families and early educators in policy decisions. **MFN was proud to bring back the tradition of Annapolis Day.** Families and staff from the networks joined legislators for lunch and engaged in direct advocacy, sharing their experiences and thanking leaders for investing in family support.

PARENT LEADERSHIP

The inaugural class of Families Leading Maryland (FLM), a statewide parent leadership initiative of MFN, created space to promote the voices and expertise of parents in advocacy. Parents in FLM were able to learn about Maryland's legislative process, reflect on issues that impact their families, and help MFN shape our advocacy agenda. **MFN incorporated parents' stories into testimony, and several parents attended our 2026 Day in Annapolis** event to talk directly to legislators about how decisions in Annapolis impact their families. MFN continues to build pathways and leadership opportunities to connect families to public policy advocacy.

CATALYZING THE CONDITIONS

As budget advocacy is a cornerstone of safety-net access and effectiveness, MFN, in conjunction with our partners at the Maryland Center on Economic Policy, continues to co-lead a budget advocacy space for non-profit organizations. The Budget Brain Trust provides an opportunity for information sharing and capacity building. In meetings throughout the

Session, MFN connected with advocates to provide timely updates and consultation, fostering an increased impact on funding for crucial family supports.

The twice monthly meetings of MFN's Public Policy Committee facilitated collaboration, information sharing, and alignment of advocates interested in advancing an early childhood agenda. Chaired by a trusted leader from the Maryland Child Care Resource Network, the Committee brings government leaders, child care providers, and other child advocacy organizations together. Some members are longstanding, and MFN also welcomed new members this year. **Attendees report an increased understanding of the legislative and budgetary process, a growing capacity for their organizations to weigh in on key issues, and greater alignment among advocates** as a result of the meetings. MFN's capacity to continually present timely analysis of legislation and facilitate consensus building resulted in meaningful policy wins.

Improved functionality on MFN's website enables members of the Public Policy Committee and the broader community to **easily find MFN's positions on bills, up-to-the-minute status updates on legislation, bill summaries, copies of our testimony, and links to videos of the bill hearings**. Our capacity to communicate with MFN's broad network of Public Policy stakeholders also grew with the acquisition of new software to enable more targeted and strategic communications with elected leaders.

The traditional Child Care Evening in Annapolis, cosponsored by MFN and other child care advocacy organizations, took place again this Session and **resulted in an increased investment in the child care workforce**, among other successes.



Advocates at MFN's 2026 Day in Annapolis team up to ask for change and support for babies.

LOOKING AHEAD

Circumstances in Washington, DC, have advocates operating in a challenging landscape. The impact of changes to Medicaid and SNAP will reverberate through the coming years. Recent questions and **threats to the Child Care and Development Block Grant have the potential to be devastating to the child care field and to families**. MFN continues to engage our federal delegation and is closely monitoring the national discussions about child care funding. At the same time, a movement to reimagine child care as a public good has gained attention after New Mexico and New York's focused efforts to support the provision of universal child care have become more real.

Maryland's Family and Medical Leave Insurance (FAMLI) program is poised to provide greater opportunities for families to take time to care. **The Department of Labor is preparing for contributions to begin in January 2027 and the issuance of benefits to follow in January 2028**. MFN is closely monitoring implementation and seeking ways to communicate about the new benefit and its positive impact on families.

MFN looks forward to working with our partners to improve Maryland's early childhood education landscape, to center the experiences of families, and elevate the importance of family supports. Strong advocates are needed now more than ever.

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Learn more at marylandfamilynetwork.org.

