

Montgomery County Commission on Child Care
FY12 Operating Budget
County Council Testimony
April 7, 2011

Members of the County Council, I appreciate this opportunity to speak to you on behalf of the Montgomery County Commission on Child Care. My name is Mary Lou Kitchen and I am a provider representative on the Commission.

Over the past 10 years, Montgomery County has built an effective, comprehensive system of early care and education that includes early intervention and pre-kindergarten services for at-risk children, child health and mental health care, training and quality enhancements for child care providers, child care subsidy programs, home visiting, parent education and family support services, early childhood public engagement, library services and recreation and activity programs. School readiness statistics indicate that this system of services is working to close the socio-economic gap for Montgomery County children. In FY2002, 61% of our children were found to be fully ready for kindergarten. By contrast, in FY2010 76% of Montgomery County children entering kindergarten were fully ready for school.

Data consistently show that early education yields significant returns in future years and ultimately saves money and reduces deficits by increasing academic performance, improving health outcomes, decreasing reliance on social programs and building economic productivity. The availability of quality, affordable child care is crucial not only for the development of our children but also for workforce development and economic recovery. Without affordable child care, Montgomery County parents cannot work.

Of particular concern to the Commission at this time of budget reduction is the issue of child care subsidies for low income families. The rising cost of quality child care and the initiation of a wait list for state-funded child care subsidies will prevent our most vulnerable families from accessing the quality services they need and will hinder the progress we've been making in closing the socio-economic divide for children entering our public schools. A one-parent family earning \$40,000 a year, with two children in full-time care and receiving subsidies from the Working Parents Assistance Program can still spend almost \$15,000 annually on child care. This accounts for nearly 38% of the family's income. Without WPA, the chance of this family being able to access licensed child care is minimal.

We want our families to have access to quality, affordable child care, the kind of child care that produces children who are fully ready for kindergarten and beyond. This can happen only if we continue to maintain the complex network of services already in place in Montgomery County. Therefore, the Commission urges you to adopt the County Executive's budget without reduction as it applies to the Department of Health and Human Services, Early Childhood Services and, in particular, Child Care Subsidies, keeping child care costs and services within reach for all Montgomery County families.