



**Testimony Concerning SB 312:  
“Children – Family Child Care Homes and Child Care Centers –  
Advertising and Penalties”  
Submitted to the Senate Education, Health  
and Environmental Affairs Committee  
February 10, 2016**

**Position: Support**

Maryland Family Network (MFN) strongly supports SB 312, which will raise public awareness about licensed child care and enable more effective enforcement of current prohibitions against illegal child care.

MFN has worked since 1945 to improve the availability and quality of child care and early childhood education, as well as other supports for children and families in Maryland. We have been active in state and federal debates on child care policy and are strongly committed to ensuring that children, along with their working parents, have access to high-quality, affordable programs and educational opportunities.

In apparently increasing numbers, illegal child care services flout the law, betray parents' trust, and endanger children. From 2010 – 2014, at least 13 Maryland children died in unlicensed care. All children in child care need safe and healthy environments, and they need providers who are trained to understand how children grow and learn.

This bill will build awareness of child care licensing and the benefits of licensed child care among parents and unlicensed providers. Many parents who choose unlicensed care, and many providers who offer it, are unaware of child care licensing laws. Under this bill, child care providers, like MHIC contractors, will be required to include their license numbers in their advertisements. The bill also requires the ads to contain a statement that it is illegal to provide or advertise child care without a license. This latter provision effectively makes internet sites advertising child care part of a public awareness campaign spreading the word about parents' need to choose, and providers' requirement to offer, licensed child care.

SB 312 will also improve the capacity of the Office of Child Care (OCC) to enforce current licensing laws. Allowing law enforcement officers, such as sheriffs and fire marshals, to issue citations and conduct inspections when illegal providers persist, will provide additional resources in difficult cases. Increased fines for illegal care will provide a greater deterrent to those who now ignore the minimal risk of minimal fines.

SB 312 does not criminalize any care that is not currently illegal and will have no impact on informal child care providers paid by the Child Care Subsidy Program. It is designed to make the licensing laws currently in effect more enforceable.

We understand that the bill sponsor intends to propose two amendments, one to allow local fire marshals to participate in the same capacity as the State Fire Marshal, and a second to clarify that there is no criminal penalty for advertising an unlicensed child care program. We support these amendments.

MFN strongly urges your favorable consideration of SB 312.