



**Testimony Concerning SB 794:  
“Education – Prekindergarten and Kindergarten Assessments - Administration”  
Submitted to the Senate Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee  
March 2, 2016**

**Position: Oppose**

Maryland Family Network (MFN) opposes SB 794, which would require the statewide Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA) to be limited to a random sample of kindergarten students from within each local school system. The KRA continues Maryland’s pioneering school-readiness assessment of incoming kindergartners, the results of which have been instrumental in improving our State’s system of early childhood education. SB 794 would limit the rich data collected on students’ prior care settings. This would hamper our ability to identify the strengths and weaknesses of early learning programs and would undercut our efforts to close achievement gaps. MFN urges an unfavorable report.

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.

Over the past decade and a half, Maryland has become a national leader in early childhood. Maryland launched a kindergarten readiness assessment in SY 2001-2002 and soon became the first state in the country to assess every incoming kindergartner. The results have helped teachers identify early gaps and intervene accordingly. Just as important, the data—when disaggregated by such factors as family income, ethnicity, and prior care setting—have helped the State recognize factors that put children at risk for lacking school readiness and begin to address their needs before they arrive in kindergarten. Partly as a result, Maryland has witnessed a dramatic increase in school readiness: in 2001-2002, 49% of incoming kindergartners were assessed as “fully ready”; by 2013-2014, that number had risen to 83%.

For the 2014-2015 school year, Maryland instituted the new KRA tool, developed in conjunction with Ohio under the terms of our federal Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge grant. As one might anticipate with a transition of this type, the first year of implementation revealed some areas for improvement. For the 2015 – 2016 school year, the Maryland State Department of Education reduced the number of items on the KRA by 20%, made improvements to the data transfer of enrollment information and connectivity, and updated reporting features for teachers, resulting in a better overall experience. MFN does not wish to minimize the frustrations that teachers may have encountered in the transition, but given the undeniable progress that assessment has brought to early childhood education in Maryland, MFN submits that the census data about kindergarten students’ prior care setting is too important to discard. We fervently hope the KRA will continue to be administered to all kindergarten students and urge your unfavorable consideration of SB 794.