

Growing Family Child Care Opportunities (GOFCC)

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Framework of Growing Family Child Care Opportunities (GOFCC)

The decline in family child care (FCC) providers remains a pressing issue. Nationally, between 2017 and 2021, nearly 8,000 FCC homes closed, with the pandemic accelerating the loss of providers¹. Many providers shared the top reasons for leaving the child care profession are stress and/or burnout and licensing regulations as noted in the child care resource and referral report. In Maryland, the number of registered FCC providers has decreased from 12,514 in 1996 to around 4,600 by mid-2023—a drop of more than 60%. Projections indicate a further 41% decline by 2025 if current trends continue². This reduction has left many communities, especially rural and underserved areas, struggling to find affordable child care, which in turn hampers family stability and local economic growth.

The decline in family child care (FCC) presents a complex challenge, particularly in underserved communities. To address this issue, the Montgomery County Child Care Resource Center launched the Growing Opportunities for Family Child Care (GOFCC) initiative in 2015. This program focuses on recruiting and supporting individuals to become licensed FCC providers through training, coaching, and business support. By prioritizing multilingual, culturally competent assistance, GOFCC aims to better serve diverse communities.

In 2021, the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), in collaboration with the Maryland Family Network (MFN), expanded GOFCC to three additional jurisdictions. Supported by planning and implementation grants funded through the American Rescue Plan Act and MSDE, Child Care Resource Centers across multiple counties adapted the program to address local needs. This expansion not only increased access to child care but also bolstered the long-term sustainability of the FCC workforce. The inclusion of two additional jurisdictions further amplifies the program's reach, strengthening support for families and providers statewide.

¹ Child Care Aware of America. (2022). The U.S. and the high price of child care: An examination of a broken system. Retrieved from <https://www.childcareaware.org/>.

² Maryland Family Network. (2023). Statewide trends in family child care: Maryland child care resource and referral network report. Retrieved from <https://www.marylandfamilynetwork.org>.

GOFCC Statewide Replication/ Expansion & FY23 Implementation Highlights

In FY23, five Child Care Resource Centers (CCRCs) implemented customized licensure pathways, incorporating learning cohorts, coaching, professional development, and access to critical resources like Maryland EXCELS and the Child Care Scholarship program. These initiatives targeted jurisdictions with the greatest child care needs, including Baltimore City, Baltimore County, and rural areas such as Garrett and Somerset counties.

Despite challenges like zoning requirements, housing repairs, and regulatory delays, the CCRCs successfully reduced the average licensure pathway completion time from 7–12 months to just 4–6 months—a 33% improvement. The CCRCs also surpassed their Year 1 recruitment goal, inviting 195 participants, of whom 75% completed the pathway. Fifty-two participants obtained their MSDE OCC registrations, adding 360 new child care slots, with an additional 256 slots anticipated.

GOFCC further enhanced support by introducing shared services, launching a dedicated website, and providing branded materials. Fourteen leaders were trained in business administration, while participants received technology bundles upon completing their registrations. The program also fostered professional networking through NAFCC memberships and business management software subscriptions.

Participant feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with 96% recommending the program. Most notably, the CCRCs' efforts helped reduce the anticipated annual decline in family child care providers from 8% to just 2.37% in 2022–2023. This significant achievement not only sustains the family child care workforce but also strengthens access to essential child care services for Maryland's communities.

GOFCC Statewide Replication/ Expansion Implementation Grants for Year 2 (FY24 Update)

GOFCC'S SECOND YEAR: EVOLVING TO MEET STAKEHOLDER NEEDS

In its second year, the Growing Opportunities for Family Child Care (GOFCC) initiative reinforced its commitment to core objectives while expanding its impact in response to stakeholder feedback. GOFCC's primary goals remained focused on:

1. Increasing the number of family child care programs in Maryland.
2. Developing and institutionalizing a sustainable program model.
3. Building a supportive network for family child care professionals.
4. Providing access to business and pedagogical expertise to support high-quality child care delivery.

Recognizing the need to strengthen foundational business skills among family child care providers, GOFCC partnered with Civitas Strategies to develop a 4-Module Business Series. This comprehensive training equips participants with essential skills for managing successful child care businesses in Maryland. Approved by MSDE, the series enables participants to earn Continuing Education Units (CEUs) toward their annual training requirements.

FY24 ACHIEVEMENTS

The new business series was seamlessly integrated into the GOFCC pathways alongside coaching and pedagogical support. Despite this expanded focus, the average time to complete the program remained efficient at 4–6 months. GOFCC exceeded its initial Year 2 recruitment goal of 170 participants, enrolling a total of 345 individuals, including 20 co-providers and 325 prospective business owners by the end of FY24.

MEASURABLE IMPACT ACROSS MARYLAND

In FY23, Maryland welcomed 337 new family child care programs statewide, growing to 367 in FY24. GOFCC's influence was particularly significant in its 19 operational counties. Of the 219 new programs opened in these counties during FY23, GOFCC directly supported 52—nearly 23.7% of all new openings. This impact grew substantially in FY24, with 121 of the 264 new programs in these counties (over 45%) established through GOFCC.

Over the two-year period, GOFCC facilitated the opening of 173 new family child care programs, underscoring its pivotal role in addressing Maryland's child care needs. These outcomes highlight not only the program's scalability but also its transformative impact on expanding access to family child care throughout the state.

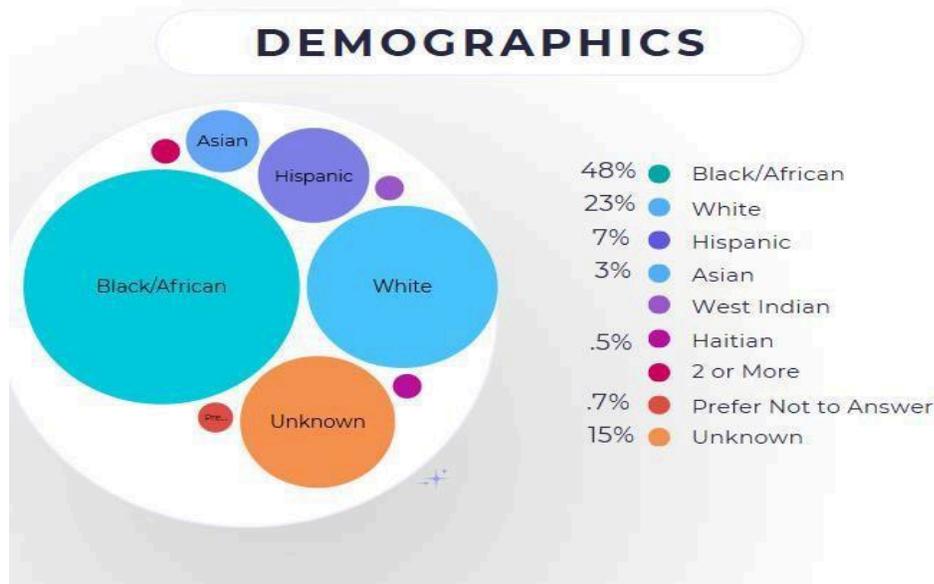
Table 1: GOFCC Participation

Jurisdiction	Total # of Participants	# Potential Child Care Openings	Pathway Completed*	OCC Registration Received	Current / Active Participants*
Baltimore City	58	464	41	35	28
Central MD North	61	488	45	27	28
Central MD South	67	536	45	21	42
Eastern Shore	91	728	50	33	22
Western MD	105	840	79	57	22

***Pathway Completed** = the number of participants who completed the GOFCC program. Individuals may or may not have earned their OCC registration.

****Current/Active Participants** = the number of participants that are currently in the program pursuing their OCC registration.

Table 2: Demographic Data



PRIORITIZING HIGH QUALITY PROGRAMMING

GOFCC continues to prioritize high-quality programming by equipping family child care providers with both pedagogical and business expertise. A key focus is Maryland EXCELS, the state's Quality Rating System, which emphasizes best practices in child care while integrating essential business strategies. Providers participating in EXCELS demonstrate a commitment to quality and gain access to the child care scholarship program—a vital financial resource for families and providers alike.

As of September 2024, 62% of all family child care programs in Maryland participate in EXCELS³, compared to 73% of GOFCC graduates, according to MSDE data. This notable engagement underscores the critical role of CCRC coaches in fostering a culture of quality and sustainability within the family child care sector.

JURISDICTIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

Each participating jurisdiction tailored GOFCC to meet local needs, showcasing the program's adaptability:

- *Abilities Network Project Act* emphasized enhanced support for Inclusion Practices ensuring that participants received evidence-based strategies to create inclusive environments that fostered an early learning culture that is responsive to all children's needs.
- In FY24, the *Family Tree* successfully secured additional funding streams that enabled them to provide essential equipment and resources to family child care providers. This support was crucial for many individuals who would not have been able to meet licensing requirements without the necessary tools, thereby facilitating their entry into the licensed child care sector.
- *Child Care Choices*, in year 2, focused their efforts on building strong interagency collaboration. During this year, the program emphasizes collaboration with multiple Office of Child Care (OCC) offices and local Judy Centers, fostering a unified approach to increasing the number of licensed family child care providers. This proactive strategy not only enhances communication and support among stakeholders but also facilitates the identification of underserved areas within Frederick County, demonstrating a targeted effort to address regional disparities in child care access.
- *Child Resource Connect* established a bilingual cohort to address language barriers, offering a Spanish-speaking group that fosters a supportive environment where participants can communicate in their native language. This approach not only improves understanding but also strengthens connections among participants, demonstrating a commitment to inclusivity and cultural responsiveness.
- The *Eastern Shore Child Care Resource Center at Salisbury University* (ESCCRC) effectively addressed the unique needs of multicultural participants, including those with language barriers, by collaborating with other Child Care Resource Centers (CCRCs) to provide essential training and coaching. Additionally, ESCCRC developed a mentoring program that paired GOFCC participants with mentors from similar cultural backgrounds, utilizing the support of

³ Maryland State Department of Education. (2024). *September 2024 monthly data report*. <https://earlychildhood.marylandpublicschools.org/system/files/filedepot/19/september2024monthlydata.pdf>

their family resource specialist and established family child care programs. This approach not only demonstrated a commitment to fostering culturally- matching caregivers in the community but also strengthened the overall quality and diversity of the child care workforce in the region.

MARYLAND FAMILY NETWORK ASSISTANCE AND FACILITATION

Throughout FY24, Maryland Family Network (MFN) continued to coordinate a "shared services" model to enhance the efficiency and impact of the GOFCC program's implementation. This approach involved several key initiatives aimed at streamlining support for family child care providers across Maryland.

MFN facilitated the creation of a unified GOFCC logo and dedicated a section of its website to promote and provide information about the program. Additionally, MFN developed targeted training for both providers and coaches to address the specific needs of each, ensuring that those facilitating the program had the necessary resources and knowledge to guide participants effectively.

MFN also provided technology bundles—including laptops and printers—to every licensed program owner, ensuring they had the necessary tools to access coaching, training, and manage the operational demands of their businesses. To further support business administration, MFN purchased subscriptions to Brightwheel, a child care management software designed to streamline administrative tasks and enhance family engagement and communication between providers and families. Recognizing the need for additional support based on stakeholder feedback, MFN collaborated with Brightwheel to offer one-on-one onboarding for each program owner, helping them fully integrate the software into their operations.

In addition to providing comprehensive shared services, Maryland Family Network's (MFN) advocacy efforts achieved a significant legislative victory in FY24. Through a key committee briefing early in the legislative session, MFN documented the outstanding results of the GOFCC program, which led to subsequent budget action and parallel legislation securing an additional two years of funding for this vital initiative. This success ensures that GOFCC can continue supporting family child care providers, helping them establish sustainable business practices and engage with state quality enhancement initiatives.

A vital aspect of MFN's role was advocating on behalf of the Child Care Resource Centers (CCRCs) and their participants throughout the licensure process. This included mediating with the Office of Child Care (OCC) on regulatory issues and assisting coaches in addressing challenges such as landlord restrictions and homeowner association policies. The partnership with OCC has been instrumental in supporting GOFCC, especially in navigating regulatory matters and ensuring participants can achieve licensure smoothly.

PROGRAM CHALLENGES

However, despite these successes, challenges persist. The program faces the ongoing need to unify the five different models across jurisdictions, each with unique needs and resources. Additionally, rapid expansion has required continual adjustments to ensure providers receive adequate training and support. Persistent barriers, such as technology access, language inclusivity, and inconsistent interpretations of COMAR regulations across regions, have impacted full participation. In some areas, communication gaps between stakeholders have further complicated progress. Many participants also

continue to encounter external obstacles, such as landlord restrictions, zoning issues, and homeowner association policies that hinder their ability to operate.

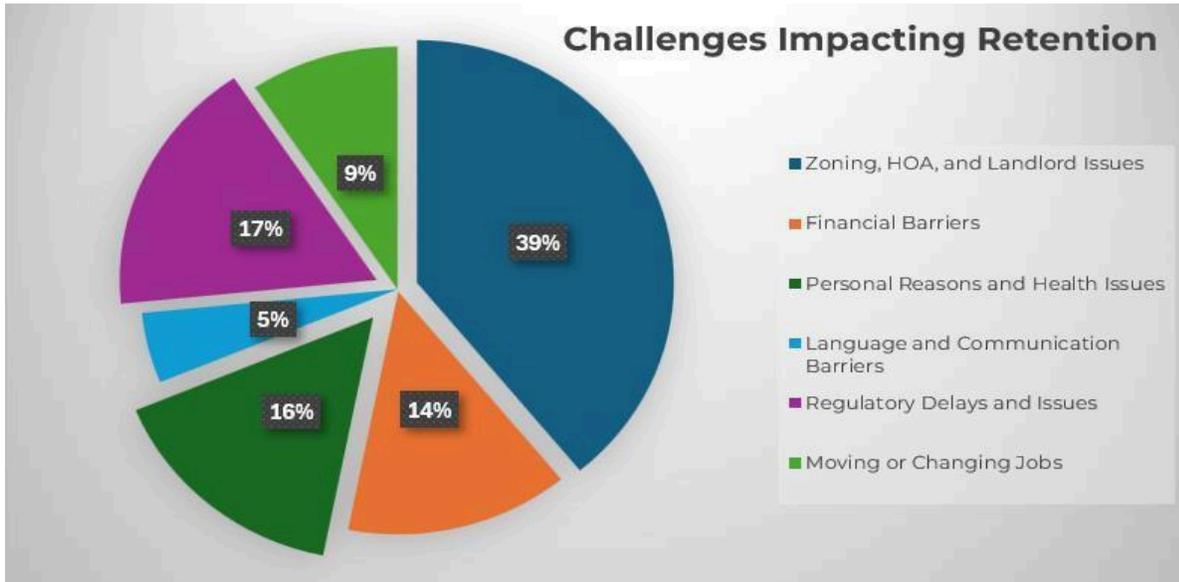
Moreover, it is important to note that a decrease in funding has posed a significant challenge. The GOFCC program previously benefited from American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds, which supported the original three Child Care Resource Centers (CCRCs) and facilitated expansion to include two additional CCRCs. ARPA funding also covered Maryland Family Network's oversight, including shared services that streamlined support for providers. However, with ARPA funds no longer available, our ability to maintain these essential services has been impacted. To sustain our progress as we head into FY25, we have sought additional funding from outside sources, but more support is urgently needed to meet the evolving needs of family child care providers and ensure program continuity.

Adding to these funding challenges is the requirement for CCRCs to contribute matching funds, either in cash or through in-kind contributions, as part of the GOFCC program grant. While some CCRCs have met this requirement without difficulty, others, particularly in rural areas, have struggled to secure these funds. This has created inequities in service delivery, with rural providers potentially receiving less comprehensive support than their urban counterparts. With ARPA funds no longer available and current legislative funding levels insufficient to cover both program costs and oversight, the risk of deepening these inequities is a growing concern. Centralizing funds to ensure consistent support and resources across all participating regions is essential for advancing equity and sustainability within the family child care workforce.

Some of the challenges encountered included:

- Zoning, HOA, and Landlord Issues (Baltimore City and Western Maryland)
- Financial Barriers (Eastern Shore, Baltimore City, Western Maryland)
- Regulatory Delays and Issues
- Language/Communication barriers
- Personal Reasons/Health Concerns

Table 3: Challenges Impacting Retention



GOFCC Statewide Replication/ Expansion Future Directions – Strategic Goals and Programmatic Actions for FY25

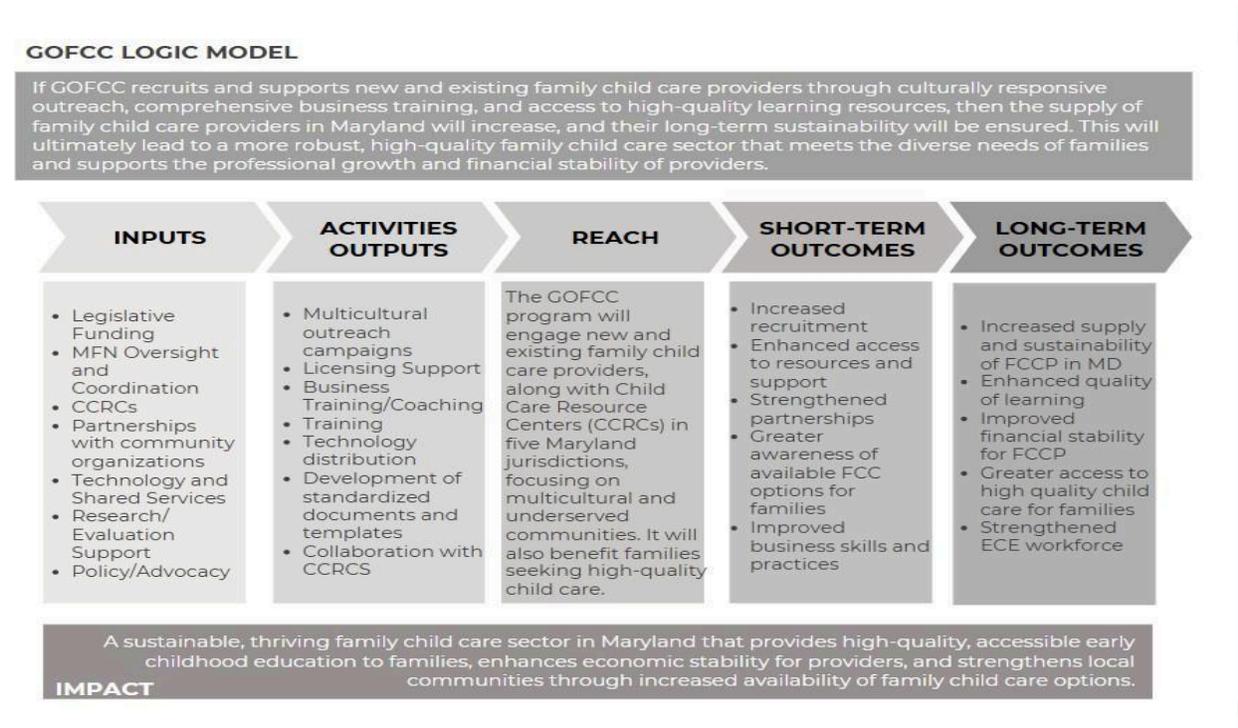
UNIFYING MODELS FOR LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY

At the start of FY24, the Maryland Child Care Resource Network set a critical goal: to unify the five distinct models introduced by each Child Care Resource Center (CCRC) into a cohesive, collaborative program. This effort aimed to create a replicable model that could serve as a standard not only across Maryland but also in other states. By analyzing each CCRC’s pathway, we identified commonalities and aligned processes, ultimately developing a clear logic model that defines the overarching purpose and goals of GOFCC. This initiative underscores our commitment to expanding and sustaining family child care in Maryland, with a focus on connecting providers to resources that enable high-quality early learning experiences.

EVALUATING PROGRESS FOR CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Recognizing the importance of assessing impact, we partnered with Child Trends, a leading national research organization, to conduct a comprehensive program evaluation. Initiated in early 2024, this evaluation will offer an in-depth review of GOFCC’s progress and effectiveness, with findings expected by October 31, 2024. The results will provide actionable insights, helping us identify areas for improvement and refine the program to meet its objectives. By leveraging this data, we aim to ensure that our unified model not only addresses current challenges but also establishes a robust foundation for long-term impact and sustainability.

Table 4: GOFCC Logic Model



LOOKING AHEAD: BUILDING A RESILIENT FAMILY CHILD CARE NETWORK

As we look to the future, the Maryland Family Network (MFN) will play a pivotal role in coordinating and overseeing the Growing Opportunities for Family Child Care (GOFCC) program in collaboration with participating Child Care Resource Centers (CCRCs). Our priorities include:

- Enhancing multicultural outreach to promote diversity among providers.
- Strengthening support for both newly registered and established family child care providers.
- Advancing financial sustainability within the family child care community.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES FOR FY25

1. *Increased Diversity:* Develop and implement a multi-faceted communications strategy, partnering with community organizations to engage racially, linguistically, and culturally diverse participants.
2. *Licensing Growth:* Increase the number of new child care licenses issued by 25% over FY24.
3. *Financial Stability:* Expand business support for existing providers through the All Our Kin Family Child Care Business Training Series.
4. *Quality Participation:* Ensure 70% of newly licensed GOFCC participants enroll in Maryland EXCELS within six months of licensure.

FY24 SUCCESSES: TRANSFORMING MARYLAND'S CHILD CARE LANDSCAPE

GOFCC continues to be a transformative force in addressing critical gaps in child care access, particularly in underserved communities. In FY24, GOFCC established 121 new family child care programs—accounting for over 45% of all new openings in the areas it serves. This achievement reflects the program's effectiveness in recruiting, training, and supporting providers while fostering a culture of quality and sustainability.

As of September 2024, 73% of registered GOFCC graduates actively participate in Maryland EXCELS, demonstrating their commitment to delivering high-quality care. These results highlight the program's pivotal role in strengthening Maryland's early childhood education system.

THE CASE FOR CONTINUED INVESTMENT

Despite its successes, GOFCC faces significant funding challenges. The \$450,000 allocated annually is insufficient to effectively operate the program across five jurisdictions, let alone expand it statewide. This funding does not account for Maryland Family Network's critical oversight and coordination, including the shared services model that has been instrumental in the program's success.

To bridge this gap, MFN has sought external funding, but without increased investment, the program's ability to sustain and scale will be severely limited. Expanded funding is essential to continue addressing the growing demand for child care services, particularly in underserved areas.

SECURING THE FUTURE OF FAMILY CHILD CARE

Family child care remains a vital component of Maryland's early childhood education system. By investing in GOFCC, we can further empower providers, enhance accessibility for families, and build a resilient, thriving network that adapts to the evolving needs of our communities. Together, MFN and the

CCRCs are committed to realizing this vision, but adequate funding is critical to sustaining this progress and ensuring a lasting impact.

References

- Child Care Aware of America. (2022). *The U.S. and the high price of child care: An examination of a broken system*. Retrieved from <https://www.childcareaware.org>
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