

Montgomery council proposes to add \$500,000 to budget for child care subsidies

by Jen Bondeson, Staff Writer, The Gazette, Published: Friday, April 27, 2012

With 2,000 needy children on waitlists to receive child care, Montgomery County Council members want to see that, in fiscal 2013, the needs of more preschoolers are met.

On Thursday, Councilwoman Valerie Ervin (D-Dist. 5) of Silver Spring introduced a proposal to add \$500,000 for child care subsidies to County Executive Isiah Leggett's (D) proposed 2013 budget. The subsidies are on a list with other items, to be considered prior to the budget's approval. The money would go toward closing a \$900,000 gap in funding.

The number of children on the waiting lists for two programs, Purchase of Care and the County's Working Parents Assistance programs, have grown by 879 since the enrollment was frozen in February 2011 and July 2011, respectively.

The reductions to child care subsidies over the last three years have affected not only children and families, but also the operation of small businesses, threatening the economic viability of the county, Ervin said.

Nuri Funes, a child care provider in the county for 19 years, told officials Thursday that families who she had served had to find other options because they had been receiving the subsidy. She lost revenue and had to let go of an assistant.

Funes said legislators do not realize that this also hurts businesses, such as her own; she has invested \$50,000 in continuing education for herself to benefit her business in the last five years.

"I am very concerned that our most vulnerable population, our children, are being impacted by the waiting list," she said.

The freeze in subsidies may also affect the number of children ready for kindergarten, as children who attend child care are more prepared than those who receive care at home, according to the 2012 State Readiness Report.

Leggett has proposed a funding increase of \$91,372 to \$2.92 million for early childhood services and a \$189,126 increase to \$3.31 million for child care subsidies. The increases cover multi-program adjustments including wage and benefit changes, reorganizations and other budget changes, according to Leggett's proposal.

Councilwoman Nancy Navarro said she hopes the county can explore other revenue sources for early childhood education.

“If we don’t do something in the first five years, we are going to be paying two or three times more in the future,” she said.

Staff Writer Kate S. Alexander also contributed to this report.