

# Presentation on the Kirwan Commission Before Joint Committees of the Maryland House

February 17, 2020

A cynic is someone who knows the cost of everything but the value of nothing. I see many critics of the Kirwan Commission as cynics because they focus exclusively on the cost of the recommendations, but ignore the financial and social benefits from fixing the problems that the Commission is trying to address. This one-sided vision raises important questions that you as legislators need to consider before you vote – especially if you object to Kirwan because of its costs. So, I ask you to consider the following points:

According to 2017 Census data, Maryland has the highest median household income in the United States.

- Why is it spending less per student than 11 other states?
- Why do critics claim that funding Kirwan would “cripple the state economy” when 11 states that have lower median incomes are providing higher per capita student funding?
- Why is Maryland underfunding the education of 53% of African-American students whereas only 8% of white students are in underfunded schools?
- Why are low income school districts, with mostly black and brown students, receiving 5% less funding than high income ones that have mostly white students?
- Why is Maryland offering the 16<sup>th</sup> highest teachers’ pay in United States?
- Why are we paying teachers 25% less than graduates with comparable educations?
- Why did 47% of second-year teachers not return for a third year in 2017?

Kirwan critics focus on costs, but ignore serious problems in our schools.

- Why was Maryland the only state to see its National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores decline from 2013 to 2015?
- Why has the performance of Maryland students declined from first in the nation to 25<sup>th</sup> in NAEP tests for reading, science, and math?
- Why are 60% of Maryland’s high-school graduates not college or career ready?
- Why are Kirwan critics willing to spend billions of dollars on school construction, but not on improving instruction?

Kirwan critics are focusing on its short-term costs, but ignoring its long-term financial benefits.

- Why are critics of Kirwan ignoring the analysis of a consultant that reports that students who receive the educational benefits proposed by Kirwan will realize \$3.6 billion higher lifetime earnings than those who stay in the current system?

- Why are critics of Kirwan ignoring the analysis that projected long-term Returns on Investment (ROI) from Kirwan could be as much as \$4.5 billion by 2046 because its cohort of 9<sup>th</sup> grade high-school students when the graduate would make less use of societal safety net programs (Medicaid, Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program, and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families)?
- Why are critics of Kirwan ignoring the social and financial benefits resulting from better educated students who are less likely to be incarcerated thus saving the state money by requiring fewer prisons and guards?

Many criticisms of Kirwan's recommendations have no factual basis or balance.

- How can critics say that "Maryland has a spending problem and can't afford Kirwan" when it has the highest family median income in the United States?
- Why are critics willing to raise millions of dollars to stop Kirwan, but not willing to work with House and Senate leaders to find the funds needed to implement Kirwan?
- Why are critics saying that the Commission should have identified sources for funding its recommendations when that requirement was not in its charter and is the responsibility of the General Assembly?
- Why are critics saying that Kirwan should be funded from teachers' pensions when that would endanger teachers' retirement incomes after years of their working with lower-than-market salaries during their careers?

A Washington Post/University of Maryland poll reports that 70% of residents not only support an increase in education funding, but 55% are also are willing to pay more in taxes to fund it.

- Why are state legislators reluctant to fund Kirwan when so many of their constituents not only support the Commission's recommendations, but are also willing to pay higher taxes to do so?

**Ultimately, the biggest hit that Maryland tax revenue could face would not be from expenditures to improve the education, but, rather, that high-tech industries will be reluctant to come here because the declining test scores of its students show that the state does not have as large and highly skilled a workforce as they need to grow their businesses.**

Prepared by:

Leonard Zuza  
Solomons, MD 20688