

SB 1000/HB 1300: Blueprint for Maryland's Future

Position: Support

Submitted by: Keegan K. Taylor, chair, Baltimore City Youth Commission and District 1 Representative; Junior, The Baltimore Polytechnic Institute

Good afternoon committee chairs and members,

My name is Keegan Taylor. I am a lifelong resident of Baltimore City, a junior at the Baltimore Polytechnic Institute, and chair of the Baltimore City Youth Commission. Advocating for equitable funding is not new in Maryland, particularly not to Baltimore City—we've been fighting for equity for decades.

As you know, the school funding formula was last changed was a result of the 2002 Thornton Commission. That was the year before I was born. That's right, the school funding formula—the foundation—has not changed in my lifetime, leaving our schools woefully underfunded—billions of dollars of underfunding. In the wealthiest state in the country, choices were made to shortchange our children—our future—me. And, the worst part of this underfunding is that is disproportionately occurs in poor communities and communities of color with 53% of African American students attending underfunded schools. Choices were made to further disenfranchise Maryland's neediest of students. The results have been devastating as we have been denied access to well rounded curriculum—arts, music, etc. because of budget cuts; we have been denied the same resources as peers in wealthier districts; in Baltimore City there are only 81 guidance counselors for 80,000 students. Choices were made to not invest in our educators so there is often a revolving door of teachers. Again, this occurs disproportionately in our most needy schools. Choices were made to not fully fund Thornton.

I know it's expensive. But, as I said before the Kirwan Commission in November: The decision before you is not a financial one; it is a moral one. And, according to the recent Sage Policy Institute report, it makes economic sense to fully fund the Blueprint. A more educated populous translates into a better prepared workforce and a better economy.

I support of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future. In fact, I first testified before the Kirwan Commission nearly three years ago and I am pleased that many of the items I advocated for then—addressing concentrated poverty, expanding community schools and prekindergarten are included in this legislation. As former SUNY chancellor Ernest Boyer said: To push for excellence today without continuing to push for access for less privileged students is to undermine the crucial but incomplete gains we have made. Equity and excellence cannot be divided.

Let's hope the children being born today don't have to wait their entire school career, as I have, hoping for equity. You have the power to make good choices. Choose me. Choose the more than 880,000 students who attend Maryland's public schools. Ensure that today's students and the next generation have the opportunity to attend an excellent public school regardless of the zip codes in which they live.

~He who opens a school door closes a prison. Victor Hugo