

Testimony in Support of House Bill 1
Historically Black Colleges and Universities—Funding

House Appropriations Committee
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The Maryland State Education Association supports House Bill 1, legislation that would require the Governor to fund the \$577 million settlement stemming from *The Coalition for Equity and Excellence in Maryland Higher Education, et. al. v. Maryland Higher Education Commission, et. al.*—the federal lawsuit involving the state’s four Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). It is rare that MSEA involves itself in matters pertaining to higher education-related issues, aside from those that specifically address teacher preparation or college access for our state’s students. It is these two issues exactly that compel MSEA members to support this legislation.

MSEA represents 75,000 educators and school employees who work in Maryland’s public schools, teaching and preparing our 896,837 students for careers and jobs of the future. MSEA also represents 39 local affiliates in every county across the state of Maryland, and our parent affiliate is the 3 million-member National Education Association (NEA).

HBCUs are a highly regarded, academically exceptional educational option for college-bound students, especially those who are part of the African diaspora. Historically, these institutions were the only option for African American students who wished to attain a postsecondary degree due to the discriminatory practices and segregation policies of the Jim Crow era. As efforts to integrate public accommodations and institutions commenced after the landmark Supreme Court ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education*, many students—including those here in Maryland—who were previously limited to attending HBCUs exclusively found themselves with the option to attend other state colleges and universities. Maryland’s flagship university system—the University of Maryland—became a direct beneficiary of integration, opening its doors to students who might have previously pursued their postsecondary educations at one of the state’s four HBCUs: Morgan State University, Coppin State University, Bowie State University, and the University of Maryland, Eastern Shore.



We find it neither necessary nor helpful to rehash the events leading to the HBCU lawsuit against the state or to relitigate the merits of the cases brought by the two parties. Instead, we remain focused on the possibilities made available thanks to the District Court of Maryland's rulings and see this legislation as a means by which to strengthen these four postsecondary options for all of Maryland's students. Additionally, given that all four of our state's HBCU have educator preparation programs, we see an extraordinary means by which to widen the ever-shrinking pipeline of candidates seeking to enter the education profession in our state, particularly candidates of color. There are numerous MSEA members who are themselves graduates of these very programs. They have gone on to do amazing work across the state, preparing our students for the robust futures to which they are entitled. As such, we encourage and support the expansion of the educator preparation programs at our HBCUs as a means of not only expanding our pipeline of diverse educators but also a component of the overall settlement.

Throughout the three years of its work, the Kirwan Commission addressed the compelling need to ensure that all of Maryland's students be college- and career-ready when they exit high school. They also addressed the serious and persistent drought in the educator pipeline, seeing it as an existential threat to the state's future economic strength and growth. If we are successful in providing every child in the state with a world class education, particularly those from historically underserved communities of color, we must also provide them with higher education options that are culturally relevant, historically and communally anchored, well-rounded in their course and degree offerings, and financially stable now and into the future. And if we are to seriously take on the crisis related to our educator workforce and its need to be more reflective of the children in our state, we must intentionally invest money and effort into strengthening the programs offered at our HBCUs who have been responsible for producing some of our best and brightest education professionals.

We recognize that this legislation carries a tremendous cost, especially as our state faces down the significant, adverse impacts brought by the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting economic challenges therein. However, we are abundantly clear that choosing not to do this comes with its own cost. We will need all of our state's higher education pillars if we are to truly launch into a bright and prosperous future.

MSEA strongly and unequivocally urges a favorable report on House Bill 1.