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Bill: HB 764 – Education – Broadening Options and Opportunities for Students and Teachers (BOOST) Program
Date: February 12, 2021
Position: Oppose
Committee: House Ways and Means Committee
Contact: Mary Pat Fannon, Executive Director

This legislation establishes the Broadening Options and Opportunity for Students and Teachers (BOOST) Program to provide scholarships for students who are eligible for the free and reduced-price lunch program to attend a nonpublic school; it requires the State Department of Education (MSDE) to administer the Program; and requires the Governor, beginning in FY '22, to include \$15 million in the annual budget bill for the Program.

The Public School Superintendents' Association of Maryland (PSSAM), representing all twenty-four local school superintendents, **opposes HB 764.**

This bill's primary purpose is to create a funding program to finance private and parochial school students at the expense of public-school students. This diversion of state revenue to finance private school student expenses, including tuition, constitutes the voucher-like program long opposed by PSSAM and public education advocates in Maryland and across the nation.

PSSAM is responsible for providing a high-quality education for close to 900,000 students. The investment in our students has reaped great dividends. Thanks to the financial commitment from our elected officials, the Maryland public school system ranks among the most successful in the nation.

Unlike nonpublic and private schools, with the exception of nonpublic special education schools, Maryland public schools are held strictly accountable by local, State, and federal laws and regulations for items such as teacher education and certification, academic standards, and anti-discrimination laws. Local superintendents fully recognize that strong accountability measures for students translates into strong accountability for public dollars invested in our public schools. In addition, it is important to note that public schools provide effective educational programs for all students, including special education, English language learners, early childhood, and rigorous high school programs that are not always available in parochial and private schools.

PSSAM strongly opposes the establishment of a state government administered program to help finance private schools and the precedent that would be the result if this legislation is successful. The financial needs of our public-school students must take priority over those who choose a private or parochial education.

For the reasons stated above, PSSAM **OPPOSES HB 764** and requests an **unfavorable** committee report.

One Voice, One Vision for Maryland's Students