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Re: SB 794: State Department of Education – Procurement and Personnel Actions

Before Senate and Budget Committee, March 1, 2022

Statement of Support

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony. I am an independent education analyst and advocate and former member of the Kirwan Commission and Baltimore City school board.

And I strongly urge passage of SB 794.

This bill may seem like inside baseball, pertaining to dull, dry state personnel and procurement practices. But it far more than that. In fact, it is no exaggeration to say that the future of our schoolchildren depends on MSDE having the management capacity to carry out and be held accountable for effective implementation of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future.

I am no expert on the intricate workings of state personnel and procurement laws. But I was Maryland secretary of human resources, and I know that such procedures can make or break reform efforts.

I also know – as I pointed out as a member of the Kirwan Commission – for years, MSDE staffing capacity had been shrinking while its duties had been expanding. I was instrumental in the passage of a section of the first Blueprint bill (HB 1030, 2019) that mandated a study of MSDE's management capacity. That study, for reasons that were never publicly explained, was never done.

Now, fortunately, State Superintendent Mohammad Choudhury has astutely brought the issue to the fore in SB 794. MSDE staff capacity has not only decreased over the past decade, but it has suffered under budget and procurement procedures that are more restrictive than for other agencies, with far less responsibilities than MSDE.

If a new day is come, and it can't come too soon for children all across the state, particularly students who are poor and of color, MSDE needs the tools to get the job done. Mr. Choudhury offers hope of the kind of leadership that has been long lacking. He's saying: I wholeheartedly support the Blueprint; I welcome the challenge; I offer bold equity-driven reform in partnership with local school districts and the Accountability and Implementation Board; I want to be held accountable; and give me the tools to do those things.

SB 794 is a big step in that direction. Let's hold MSDE accountable but let's not tie its hands.

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