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BILL: HB 1196

TITLE: County Boards of Education – Blueprint for Maryland’s Future
Implementation Coordinator – Salary Grant

DATE: March 30, 2023

POSITION: Support

COMMITTEE: Senate Education, Energy and the Environment Committee

CONTACT: Mary Pat Fannon, Executive Director, PSSAM

The Public School Superintendents’ Association of Maryland (PSSAM), on behalf of all twenty-four public school superintendents, **supports** House Bill 1196.

This bill would provide a \$150,000 appropriation to each Local Education Agency for fiscal years 2025 and fiscal 2026 for the personnel costs for a Blueprint Implementation Coordinator (IC). The bill also addresses other Blueprint initiatives including an extension for the Accountability Implementation Board’s (AIB) outside evaluation of the implementation, due to the delayed implementation of the Blueprint.

The House amended the bill directing that the funding is appropriated in the same manner as the foundation formula between the State and the local government. There has also been discussion about the bill’s wording regarding the \$150,000, specifically whether it is a state mandated salary. PSSAM has been advocating for this funding for several months, and it has been our intention that the funds would be for personnel costs, which are largely acknowledged to be inclusive of salary and fringe benefits; we did not, and do not, see this as a mandated salary.

In the final version of the Blueprint legislation (HB 1300/2020), the Legislature required the local governing body and the LEA to jointly designate Blueprint Coordinators. The requirement was that this position would be required through fiscal 2025, which was subsequently changed to fiscal 2026 during the 2021 session (HB 1372). The IC position was also mandated without an identified funding source. Lastly, the position was to be created by July 1, 2021; all districts were in compliance within one or two months of that deadline.

In July of 2021, the role of the coordinators was unclear and many districts assigned this responsibility to existing staff. Now, eighteen months later, many of the coordinators are still wearing multiple hats in their districts, and have significant responsibilities in addition to the Blueprint work. This is especially challenging in smaller districts with fewer staff and resources. For example, among the ICs there are Chief Financial Officers, Chief Administration Officers, and two or three Directors of Assessment and Reporting.

Having staff serve as the IC seemed reasonable when we (PSSAM) first started convening this group in 2021. At that point we were meeting about once a month and we were waiting for the AIB to be named, and the new State Superintendent was settling in. As the AIB and MSDE geared up, meeting frequency increased and going back to September 2021, there have been roughly 71 meetings, (excluding duplicate sessions), the bulk of which occurred beginning July 2022 when there were roughly 62 meetings. As you can see, the commitment to the Blueprint work has been immense.

The designation of ICs has created a moderate equity issue between the smaller and larger districts. Even after adjusting for the enrollment of the districts - the planning and implementation has to be done if you are a district with 200,000 students as those with 2,000 students. As we have moved through the initial year of the Blueprint, it is exceptionally clear that these ICs are integral for the proper implementation with fidelity. We recognize that there are many staff that are overworked, but we feel it is appropriate to request a carve-out for the salaries of the ICs, especially since the General Assembly mandated the position. We believe a line item in the budget would provide an equitable funding opportunity for all districts to hire and employ a full-time Blueprint Coordinator.

For these reasons, PSSAM **supports** House Bill 1196 and requests a favorable report.