



**Testimony in support of
Senate Bill 551: Education – Service Year Option Program – Establishment
(Serving Every Region Through Vocational Exploration Act of 2023)**

**Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
Position: Favorable**

February 22, 2023

Strong Schools Maryland is a network of education advocates dedicated to ensuring the full funding and faithful implementation of the Blueprint for Maryland’s Future. We advocate for legislative and regulatory policy changes to further educational equity and build the technical capacity of everyday Marylanders to hold state and local officials accountable to their responsibilities. **We stand in support of Senate Bill 551.**

The Blueprint for Maryland’s Future envisions a World-Class system of public schools for our state’s students. Now that the Blueprint is law, we have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to implement a framework that sets students up for success, especially in areas of ensuring college and career readiness and providing a diverse education workforce. This bill supports the work of the Blueprint through establishing a service year option program in the state of Maryland.

Senate Bill 551:

- Expands opportunities for recent high school graduates and other individuals with similar levels of education beyond college or career and technical training;
- Grants access to professional development, mentoring, networking, and job training opportunities for program participants; and

- Addresses short- and long-term state challenges of recruitment and retention, especially in high-needs areas like education.

We are experiencing severe deficits of employees in the state. The Maryland State Department of Education alone has [196.5 vacant positions](#) with 123 vacancies above the fiscal 2024 budgeted turnover. Further, the Blueprint *created* certain positions to meet the needs of the law. It is crucial to ensure these positions are filled for full and faithful implementation. If not, we will begin to see the severity of consequences of inaction, including our carefully constructed programs being mismanaged, local education agencies functioning without support, and the Blueprint investment itself completely nullified. This bill supports the Blueprint in two key areas: expanded opportunities for students as they depart public school college and career ready; and investment in a pipeline of talent to fill current and future staffing needs in Maryland.

This legislation presents an opportunity to bring service learning to a state level. Service learning programs like Teach for America and AmeriCorps allow graduates to explore public service and serve their communities, while still earning money and developing professionally. [A recent study](#) of an AmeriCorps program in Nevada found significant returns on investment, including: improved outcomes for various stakeholders; increased post-service earnings; increased tax revenue for government; and reduced lifetime spending on corrections, public assistance, and social insurance. Let Maryland lead the country by introducing this proven strategy through a state initiative.

SB 551 supports the Blueprint's vision to set the foundation for lifelong learning and achievement. We have promised World-Class schools. Let us provide World-Class service learning options beyond K-12 education to strengthen the future of our state.

For these reasons, we urge a favorable report on Senate Bill 551.

For more information, contact:

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