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Susan O'Neill, Chair

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Testimony in Support of
House Bill 902 – Prekindergarten - Ulysses Currie Head Start Program - Eligibility for State
Funds
House Appropriations Committee
Tuesday, February 28, 2024

The Rural Maryland Council supports House Bill 902 – Prekindergarten - Ulysses Currie Head Start Program - Eligibility for State Funds. This bill allows providers in the Ulysses Currie Head Start Program to receive State funds and exempts them from certain requirements for eligible prekindergarten providers.

The Kirwin Blueprint proposes that 30% of pre-K students should be served by "private" providers instead of local school systems. This mainly refers to the Head Start programs in rural areas. While the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) has offered Head Starts opportunities to improve their financial base and enable better pay for teachers, they have not provided certification for teachers, which is a requirement in the Blueprint. This bill aims to extend the deadline until a decision is made on how to proceed, and we hope that this extension will provide conditional credentialing to pre-K teachers, as it does for K-12 teachers.

Moreover, Head Start programs cannot receive any funding from the Local Education Agency (LEA), which is the school system. However, in some cases, Head Start programs can get a deal on rent in school-owned buildings. In such cases, they are requesting that the requirement that Head Start programs cannot receive any funding from the LEA should be removed. These programs do not ask for direct financial support from the school systems.

Rural schools often face obstacles such as limited resources compared to their urban counterparts. These challenges can significantly impact the quality of education provided to students. To address this issue, a bill has been introduced that seeks to provide additional funding to schools in rural areas. The aim is to ensure that these schools have the necessary resources to support student learning, maintain their facilities, and retain qualified teachers. By providing these critical resources, students in rural areas can have the same opportunities for academic success as their urban peers.

The Rural Maryland Council respectfully requests your favorable support of House Bill 902.

The Rural Maryland Council (RMC) is an independent state agency governed by a nonpartisan, 40-member board that consists of inclusive representation from the federal, state, regional, county, and municipal governments, as well as the for-profit and nonprofit sectors. We bring together federal, state, county, and municipal government officials as well as representatives of the for-profit and nonprofit sectors to identify challenges unique to rural communities and to craft public policy, programmatic or regulatory solutions.