



**Testimony in SUPPORT of
Senate Bill 161: Community Schools - Alterations**

Budget & Taxation Committee

Position: Favorable

January 24, 2024

Strong Schools Maryland exists to advocate, build power, and share resources with invested Marylanders to co-create strong public schools whose graduates are equipped to thrive. This year, our 2024 legislative priorities include *Fortify the Blueprint*, which is necessary to ensure that the realities of implementation are accounted for in statutes related to the law. To that end, **we are happy to support Senate Bill 161: Community Schools–Alterations.**

This bill does several things:

- Reinstates language codifying national best practices in Community Schools implementation, which was stripped from the 2019 bill (now Chapter 529) before passage;
- Provides some flexibility in the use of Concentration of Poverty grant dollars to local education agencies with fewer than 40 qualifying schools, to support local coordination of the strategy and provide support to Community School Coordinators;
- Directs schools to equitably allocate funding to address identified school community needs as a part of the needs and assets assessment developed at the individual school level; and
- Requires greater transparency and appropriate collaboration between MSDE and local school development, approval, and evaluation of Community Schools implementation plans.

In the course of our work this past year, engaging, educating, and—most importantly— learning from those directly impacted by Blueprint implementation, a clear need for the various provisions of this bill has been made evident.

At this moment, when state and local leaders are wavering in their commitment to the Blueprint, the legislature must do all it can to support the success of students and school communities as the law is implemented. This is a continuous improvement, with no additional fiscal impact.

For these reasons, we urge a favorable report on Senate Bill 161.

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