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**BILL:** HB 1441

**TITLE:** Early Childhood Education - Publicly Funded Prekindergarten Programs - Alterations

**DATE:** March 27, 2024

**POSITION:** Favorable with Amendments

**COMMITTEE:** Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

**CONTACT:** Mary Pat Fannon, Executive Director, PSSAM

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The Public School Superintendents' Association of Maryland (PSSAM), on behalf of all twenty-four Maryland local school superintendents, **supports** House Bill 1441 with **amendments**.

This bill proposes numerous changes related to publicly funded prekindergarten programs, but most importantly, it would extend funding for the very successful Prekindergarten Expansion Grant Program through FY 2029.

One of the bedrocks of The Blueprint for Maryland's Future is the expansion of public and private prekindergarten programs. In fact, the expansion of seats, and improvements in Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA) scores have been one of the most celebrated early victories in many school systems.

PSSAM deeply appreciates the sponsor's comprehensive efforts to address many of the implementation challenges in Pillar I - Early Childhood. We believe this legislation is greatly improved but we hope the committee will consider the following suggested amendments.

In order to accomplish ambitious prekindergarten goals, the Blueprint established a complex, yet innovative mixed delivery model employing both public and private prekindergarten providers. The goal is a 50/50 system, with the local school systems responsible for recruiting private providers. To date, the participation of private providers has been slow to materialize, with many

of the barriers to participation beyond the control of LEAs. It is important to note that LEAs are not the credentialing authority for private providers, and have very little, to no control over the financial viability or operations of these private businesses.

In an effort to address this slow rate of participation, HB 1441 establishes mandated rates of 10% per year in the growth of private PreK seats. We strongly request an amendment to reasonably reflect the essential partnership between the State, private providers, and local school systems in meeting this goal. Therefore, we ask the committee to consider the following language: on page 6, in line 25, after “shall,” insert “**MAKE REASONABLE EFFORTS TO**”.

In keeping with this sentiment of partnership, we ask that the following language be struck: lines 19-22 of page 7, which would indicate to the casual, or even educated observer, that the inability to attract private providers to this model is the result of local school systems “not fully embracing the mixed delivery system.”

We also request that the committee strongly consider removing the proposal for MSDE to develop a career ladder for private PreK providers and their employees. LEAs have been struggling with the development and negotiations of the career ladder mandated in the Blueprint for the last two and a half years. While this has been an extensive and complicated implementation effort, we are well situated to work with our union partners. There is no such infrastructure for the development of a career ladder system for the private sector, and we are deeply concerned about the diversion of limited staffing and financial resources from MSDE to assist the private sector in such a significant undertaking.

We appreciate the Committee’s consideration of our recommendations and suggestions, and request a **favorable with amendments** report.