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Susan O'Neill, Chair

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Testimony in Support with of
Senate Bill 1102 – Education – Blueprint for Maryland’s Future – Alterations
Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
February 23, 2024

The Rural Maryland Council supports Senate Bill 1102 – Education – Blueprint for Maryland’s Future – Alterations. This bill makes alterations to numerous education-related programs in the State including prekindergarten, early childhood, professional development, and educator student loan assistance programs and postpones certain reporting and related deadlines regarding implementation and continuance of the Blueprint for Maryland’s Future (the Blueprint).

The Blueprint for Maryland presents several benefits tailored to Maryland’s rural communities.

- **Equitable Funding Distribution** - Rural schools often struggle with limited resources compared to their urban counterparts. The Blueprint aims to address this disparity by providing additional funding to schools in rural areas, ensuring that they have the necessary resources to support student learning, maintain facilities, and retain qualified teachers.
- **Access to Quality Education:** Rural communities may face challenges related to geographic isolation, limited infrastructure, and socioeconomic factors that impact educational opportunities. The Blueprint includes provisions to expand access to high-quality education in rural areas, such as investments in technology, transportation services, and community partnerships to support student success.
- **Support for Rural Educators:** The Blueprint recognizes the unique needs of educators in rural schools and includes measures to support their professional development, enhance recruitment and retention efforts, and provide incentives to attract qualified teachers to rural areas. By investing in rural educators, the Blueprint aims to strengthen the teaching workforce and improve educational outcomes for students.
- **Innovative Solutions for Rural Schools:** The Blueprint encourages the adoption of innovative instructional practices and flexible learning models that can benefit rural schools, such as blended learning, distance education, and career and technical education programs tailored to local workforce needs. These strategies can help rural schools overcome geographic barriers and provide students with diverse learning opportunities.

Overall, the Blueprint for Maryland aims to address the unique challenges facing rural communities and improve educational outcomes for students in these areas by providing equitable funding, expanding access to quality education, supporting rural educators, promoting innovative solutions, and fostering community engagement and collaboration. The adjustments highlighted in this bill provide Maryland’s rural school systems and smaller governments with a practical flexibility to meet the requirements of the Blueprint as originally written. The primary concern of rural schools and counties with the Blueprint has been the cost associated with it, and the growing fear that rural counties and government cannot keep up with the timeline of implementation associated with the Blueprint. The extension of deadlines will provide the critical time needed to fully prepare for the implementation of the Blueprint for rural Maryland.

The Rural Maryland Council respectfully requests your favorable support of Senate Bill 1102.

“A Collective Voice for Rural Maryland”