

HB 1157/SB 937 Grow Your Own Educators Grant Program – Favorable

Good afternoon Chairwoman Atterbeary and Ways & Means committee members,

I'm Sally Murek, the Paraeducator Program Manager for Montgomery County Public Schools and a vice-president representing paraeducators on the executive Board of SEIU Local 500 which represents over 20,000 members serving Marylanders from cradle to career.

I'm here today to speak favorably in support of the passage of **HB 1157, Grow Your Own Educators.**

The provision to provide grants for local school systems for certain employees who pledge to fulfill a certain service obligation as a full-time teacher in the State is greatly needed as districts struggle to find, hire, and retain qualified educators. Requiring MSDE to administer and monitor the program along with the Blueprint Accountability and Implementation Board will support fiscal accountability. A key provision in this legislation is requiring the payment of a living wage to the educational support professionals moving through the program, along with the requirement they be offered the benefits of their district. Requiring the Governor to include a certain appropriation in the annual budget bill will maintain the Program for years to come. And MSDE should release on its website transparent data each year on the Program and its effectiveness.

Education support professionals (ESPs), sometimes called paraeducators or paraprofessionals, may wish to pursue teacher certification yet they need financial and mentoring support to reach their goal.

Research indicates that education support professionals who attain teacher certification are more likely to

- remain in the classroom than teachers prepared through other pathways,
- to reflect the racial and linguistic diversity of the students they serve,
- are more effective at improving student test scores in reading and math,
- are more likely to remain in teaching compared to teachers who did not have prior classroom experience.

In Maryland and in the U.S., education support professionals are more likely to be people of color than certificated educators. Providing pathways to certification for interested education support professionals is a promising strategy toward a teaching workforce that better reflects the diversity of Maryland's students.

The Blueprint for Maryland's Future identifies paraprofessional-to-teacher Grow Your Own pathways as a strategy to achieve Pillar 2 – High Quality and Diverse Teachers and Leaders. It also notes that Grow Your Own programs can help recruit multilingual staff.

Other Considerations:

- All education support professional roles are critical to a school's success and daily functioning and should not be viewed as "stepping stones" to certificated roles. All education support professionals deserve a living wage regardless of their interest in becoming a teacher.
- Grow Your Own programs often require a commitment for participants to teach locally for a certain number of years upon graduation, though policies may also include caveats for those who are unable to complete the program or find a job.
- The development of diverse and highly qualified mentor teachers is an important element of successful Grow Your Own programs, and LEAs should consider how their Career Ladder can help develop mentor teachers to support GYO efforts.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in favor of HB 1157 and I ask for your favorable consideration of this legislation.