

**FAVORABLE**  
**House Bill 1157**  
**Grow Your Own Educators Program - Established**

**House Ways and Means Committee**  
**February 21, 2024**

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**MSEA President**

The Maryland State Education Association strongly supports House Bill 1157, which would establish the Grow Your Own Educators Grant program, a program to support education support professionals such as paraprofessionals who wish to gain teacher certification through local pathways. The program would provide grants to eligible collaboratives of local education agencies, institutions of higher education, and educators' unions. It would also establish requirements and best practices for the implementation and funding of Grow Your Own pathways.

MSEA represents 75,000 educators and school employees who work in Maryland's public schools, teaching and preparing our almost 900,000 students so they can pursue their dreams. MSEA also represents 39 local affiliates in every county across the state of Maryland, and our parent affiliate is the 3-million-member National Education Association (NEA).

Maryland continues to face educator shortages, high rates of teacher attrition, and a teaching workforce that is less racially and linguistically diverse than Maryland's students. Shortages are especially pronounced in areas such as special education, early childhood and elementary education, and English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). Last year, the Educator Shortage Reduction Act made a commitment to address these issues, and one we appreciate. But one key element of the original bill, a \$5 million Grow Your Own Educators program was removed from the bill before its final passage.

As federal ESSER funds expire this year and Grow Your Own pilot programs for recruiting teachers are likely to end, now is the time to create a long-term Grow Your Own program that supports education support professionals who wish to become classroom teachers. The Accountability and Implementation

Board has identified programs like these as an essential tool to achieving the Blueprint's goal of a high-quality and diverse teacher workforce.

Studies suggest that education support professionals who become teachers are more effective and more likely to remain in the classroom than teachers prepared through other pathways. Maryland's education support professional workforce also better reflects the racial diversity of our students and communities than the current teaching workforce. Supporting education support professionals who are interested in becoming teachers will help Maryland meet our goal of diversifying the profession and may also improve teacher retention.

All education support professionals are essential and deserve a living wage whether or not they wish to become teachers. But those who do should have the opportunity to do so without taking on debt or losing their job and benefits while they study. Education support professionals are already committed educators who work with students every day, and they are well positioned to continue that work in teaching roles if they choose to do so.

Importantly, this program in this bill is not intended to rely on state funding alone. The grant requirements would direct collaboratives to identify long-term funding sources such as federal funds for apprenticeships and high-need content areas. Passing this bill would codify best practices for Grow Your Own programs and create a framework to begin pulling in creative funding sources to support innovative programs.

**We urge the committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 1157.**