



**TESTIMONY ON HOUSE BILL 297  
Adult Education – High School Diploma Pathways –  
GED Option Pilot Program and MDiplomaWorks Pathway**

**House Ways and Means Committee February 11, 2026 at 2 PM**

**POSITION: FAVORABLE**

Bill Sponsor: Chair, Ways and Means Committee (By Request -  
Departmental - Labor)

Honorable Chairperson and Members Committee:

On behalf of People on the Go Maryland, the statewide self-advocacy and systems advocacy organization run for and by people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. We are writing to express our strong support for House Bill 297, which establishes the GED Option Pilot Program and the MDiplomaWorks pathway. We respectfully request a favorable report on this important legislation.

For many people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, the traditional path to a high school diploma can be extremely difficult or even impossible. Some of us struggle with standardized tests. Some of us need more hands-on learning and real-world experience. Some of us have had our

education interrupted or have not received the support we needed in traditional school settings. House Bill 297 recognizes that there is more than one way to learn and more than one way to earn a high school diploma.

### **The GED Option Pilot Program: Opening New Pathways**

The GED Option Pilot Program will expand opportunities for students who are at significant risk of not completing high school through the traditional route. This includes many students with disabilities who face barriers in conventional educational settings. Research shows that students with disabilities who participate in GED programs with appropriate accommodations—such as extended time, extra breaks, separate testing rooms, and alternative test formats—can successfully earn their high school credentials.

Alternative pathways to high school diplomas have proven successful in other states. In California, students with significant cognitive disabilities who participate in alternative diploma pathways have gained access to postsecondary education and employment opportunities that were previously out of reach. These programs recognize that earning a high school diploma is not just about academics—it is a rite of passage that opens doors to higher-income jobs, greater independence, and a higher quality of life.

### **The MDiplomaWorks Pathway: Recognizing Real-World Skills**

The MDiplomaWorks pathway is especially important for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities because it recognizes that learning happens in many places—not just in classrooms. This pathway allows individuals to earn a high school diploma by demonstrating career competencies, earning industry-recognized credentials, completing career and technical education coursework, and gaining on-the-job learning experience. This approach honors the skills we develop through work and training, not just what we can memorize for a test.

Research demonstrates that career and technical education (CTE) programs provide significant benefits for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Studies show that students with disabilities who participate in CTE programs, technology education, and school-to-career initiatives experience greater success in employment. The National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 found that CTE and job readiness training increase the likelihood of paid employment for students with disabilities by 7.4 times. These programs also help develop essential soft skills such as work

ethic, perseverance, teamwork, critical thinking, and time management—skills that are crucial for success in any job.

For people with disabilities, earning a high school diploma has a direct impact on employment outcomes. Data from 2015 shows that among adults with disabilities aged 25-64, only 15% who had not completed high school were employed, compared to 22% with a high school diploma, 31% with some college, and 45% with a bachelor's degree or higher. Work-based learning experiences during high school make a difference too—students with disabilities who are employed before exiting high school are nearly 3.8 times more likely to be employed one year later.

### **Why This Matters to Us**

Many of us at People on the Go have experienced firsthand the barriers that exist when you do not have a high school diploma. Without a diploma, it is harder to get a good job. It is harder to access training programs. It is harder to be taken seriously. It affects our self-esteem and our ability to live independently in the community.

House Bill 297 recognizes that intelligence and ability come in many forms. Some of us are excellent workers but struggle with tests. Some of us learn best by doing, not by sitting in a classroom. The MDiplomaWorks pathway and the GED Option Pilot Program give us a fair chance to prove what we know and what we can do. They give us a chance to earn the same credential—a Maryland high school diploma—through a path that works for our learning style and our strengths.

### **A Thoughtful and Responsible Approach**

We appreciate that House Bill 297 establishes the GED Option as a pilot program that will be carefully evaluated. The bill requires the Department of Labor and the State Department of Education to report on the program's effectiveness, including feedback from students, educators, and parents, and the number of students who successfully earn diplomas. This thoughtful approach ensures that the program can be improved and expanded based on real results.

The pilot program will serve at least three local school systems with geographic diversity, allowing up to 150 students per system to participate. This means that hundreds of young people who might otherwise drop out of school will have a real pathway to success. And because the program

specifically targets students at significant risk of not completing high school, it will serve exactly the population that needs it most—including many students with disabilities.

## **Conclusion**

People with intellectual and developmental disabilities deserve the opportunity to earn a high school diploma and to access the employment, education, and independence that come with it. House Bill 297 creates pathways that recognize our abilities, honor different ways of learning, and give us a fair chance to succeed.

People on the Go of Maryland strongly supports House Bill 297 and respectfully requests that this committee issue a favorable report. This legislation represents an important step toward educational equity and opportunity for all Maryland students.

Thank you for your consideration and for your commitment to supporting all Maryland students.

Respectfully submitted,

People on the Go Maryland

### **For questions, please contact:**

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