
TO: House Ways and Means Committee

BILL: HB 297 - Adult Education – High School Diploma Pathways – GED Option Pilot Program and MDiplomaWorks Pathway

DATE: February 11, 2026

POSITION: Letter of Information

EXPLANATION:

The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) is providing information regarding House Bill 297. With the amendments proposed by the Maryland Department of Labor, in coordination with MSDE, the bill establishes the MDiplomaWorks pathway as an alternative method for adult learners to earn a Maryland high school diploma. The bill places administration of this pathway within the Maryland Department of Labor (MD Labor) and provides for coordination with the State Board of Education regarding the awarding of diplomas.

Senate Bill 70 authorizes the MDiplomaWorks pathway as an option for individuals who have not earned a high school diploma, are no longer subject to compulsory school attendance, and have withdrawn from a traditional public or private school program. Under the bill, individuals may demonstrate equivalency to a Maryland high school diploma through a combination of academic and career-related components, including industry-recognized credentials, formal assessments of foundational academic skills, career and technical education coursework, and on-the-job learning experiences. A diploma would be awarded upon completion of the pathway in accordance with regulations adopted by the Secretary of Labor and the State Board of Education.

MSDE notes that the bill reflects broader, ongoing discussions across state agencies regarding the need to expand access to high school diploma pathways for learners whose educational trajectories do not align with traditional models. In particular, MSDE appreciates the opportunity to collaborate with the Maryland Department of Labor to explore options to expand access to GED programming for high school-aged students, especially those who may benefit from alternative approaches to completing secondary education. MSDE supports the amendments proposed by MD Labor to remove the GED-Option pilot program from this bill and believes that further conversation and research, conducted in partnership with both agencies and additional stakeholders, will strengthen this work.

While MSDE is not responsible for administering the MDiplomaWorks pathway, the Department recognizes the importance of maintaining clarity and consistency regarding diploma requirements, equivalency, and statewide expectations. As contemplated in the bill, any awarding of a Maryland high school diploma remains subject to the authority of the State Board of Education, underscoring the need for clear regulatory alignment and communication across agencies.

MSDE respectfully provides this information to support the General Assembly's understanding of HB 297 and appreciates the continued partnership with the Maryland Department of Labor in examining strategies to expand educational access while maintaining the integrity of Maryland's diploma standards.

For further information, please contact Laurel Cratsley, Interim Executive Director of Government Affairs, at 443-571-5461 or Laurel.Cratsley@maryland.gov.