



HB0505 – Public Schools and Nonpublic Schools – Student Transfers – Academic Records - Documentation

Position: Favorable

February 18, 2026

The Maryland Alliance for Racial Equity in Education (MAREE), a coalition of education advocacy, civil rights, and community-based organizations committed to eliminating racial disparities in Maryland's education system, **writes in strong support of HB0505 which would allow schools to accept certain unofficial documents to satisfy academic records requirements for student transfers.** This bill addresses a critical barrier that disproportionately impacts Maryland's most vulnerable students—those experiencing homelessness, housing instability, foster care transitions, family crises, immigration challenges, and economic hardship. When schools refuse to accept unofficial documentation and instead require only official transcripts, they create unnecessary delays that keep students out of classrooms, disrupt their education, and compound the trauma they are already experiencing.

The students most affected by rigid documentation requirements are already on the margins economically, socially, and in terms of mental health. A family fleeing domestic violence may not have time to request official records from their previous school. A student in foster care may have transferred multiple times, with records scattered across jurisdictions. Immigrant families may face language barriers, unfamiliarity with school bureaucracy, or documentation from schools in other countries that are difficult to verify quickly. Families experiencing homelessness often lack stable addresses to receive mailed transcripts, and they may be moving frequently between shelters, motels, or the homes of relatives. For these students, every day out of school matters. Missing even a week of instruction creates academic gaps, erodes confidence, and increases the risk of disengagement and dropout.

Beyond the academic impact, prolonged enrollment delays contribute to profound instability in students' lives. School is not just a place to learn—it is a source of structure, routine, safety, and social connection. When students cannot enroll because they lack the "right" paperwork, they lose access to meals, counseling services, trusted adults, and peer relationships that are essential to their wellbeing. The stress of being unable to attend school compounds existing mental health challenges, particularly for students who are already navigating trauma, anxiety, depression, or the effects of adverse childhood experiences. Parents and guardians also experience significant stress as they navigate bureaucratic obstacles while trying to provide stability for their children. The message sent by inflexible documentation policies is clear: your crisis is not our priority, and your child's education can wait. This is unacceptable.

HB505 recognizes that unofficial documents—such as report cards, progress reports, previous school records held by families, or even documentation from previous teachers—can provide sufficient information to place a student appropriately while official records are being obtained. Schools can and should verify unofficial documents later, but allowing immediate enrollment based on available documentation ensures that students do not lose critical instructional time. This approach is consistent with federal protections under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, which requires schools to enroll students experiencing homelessness immediately, even if they lack complete records. HB505 extends this principle of compassion and common sense to all students facing documentation barriers, ensuring that Maryland's commitment to educational access is real and not merely symbolic.

This legislation is fundamentally about equity. Students from stable, well-resourced families rarely encounter significant delays in transferring schools because their parents have the time, knowledge, and resources to secure official documentation quickly. But for students whose families are in crisis, who lack reliable internet access or transportation, or who are navigating systems alone, the requirement for official documentation becomes an insurmountable barrier. By accepting unofficial documents to initiate enrollment, schools can ensure that every student—regardless of their circumstances—has immediate access to education. Schools can then work with families and previous institutions to obtain official records for permanent files, but this process should not prevent a child from sitting in a classroom, receiving instruction, and feeling the stability that school provides.

HB505 is a practical, compassionate solution to a problem that harms Maryland's most vulnerable students. It does not compromise academic standards or data integrity—it simply acknowledges the reality that some students cannot produce official documentation quickly, and that reality should not cost them their education.

I urge you to support HB505 and ensure that every student in Maryland can enroll in school immediately, regardless of the paperwork they have in hand. Education is a right, not a privilege contingent on having the perfect documents at the perfect time.

peace & truth,
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