
MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF LABOR TESTIMONY ON HOUSE BILL 297

TO: Ways and Means Committee Members
FROM: Andrew Fulginiti, Legislative Director, MD Labor
DATE: February 11, 2026
BILL: Expanding High School Diploma Pathways - GED Option™ Pilot Program and *MDiplomaWorks*

MD LABOR POSITION: SUPPORT WITH DEPARTMENTAL AMENDMENT

With the attached Departmental amendment, HB297 establishes a brand new, no-cost High School Diploma (“Diploma”) pathway: *MDiplomaWorks*.

Building upon Governor Moore’s goal of “leaving no one behind,” the bill will support the nearly 500,000 Marylanders who do not have this life-changing credential. In our State, individuals without a Diploma have a median salary that is \$10,000 less per year (\$35,597) than those with a Diploma (\$45,273), according to research by the Maryland Department of Labor’s (MD Labor) Labor Market Information Unit. Expanding Diploma pathways will help more constituents access quality careers, Registered Apprenticeships, and family-sustaining pay.

This program could be implemented with existing MD Labor resources, which is especially critical at a time when the federal Adult Education funding landscape is in jeopardy.

The *MDiplomaWorks* program outlined in HB297 establishes a fourth alternative Diploma pathway for adult learners, allowing them to combine workforce **and** academic credentials to demonstrate high school level-proficiency.

There are currently three options for Adult Learners to earn a High School Diploma in Maryland: the GED® Test, which consists of four standardized subject matter exams; the National External Diploma Program (NEDP®), a portfolio-based strategy that learners complete at their own pace with a trained NEDP Assessor; and Adult High School, where individuals aged 21 and older take traditional high school courses.

However, these existing pathways are not an effective option for *all* Marylanders, as many adults without an HSD have to juggle work and family obligations, or struggle with standardized testing. Additionally, resources to administer these pathways are stretched thin.

The *MDiplomaWorks* pathway will provide an additional, no-cost avenue for adult

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learners to demonstrate high school-level proficiency through a combination of any of the following components, as approved by MD Labor and MSDE:

1. Earning an industry-recognized credential;
2. Demonstrating foundational academic skills through assessments;
3. Completing career and technical education coursework; and
4. Completing an on-the-job-learning experience.

MD Labor and MSDE will work together to more precisely define which examinations, and credentials are sufficient to demonstrate high school equivalency through the regulation process.

This enhancement will open doors for many of the **half-million** Marylanders who do not have a Diploma, allowing them to transition into training opportunities and higher-paying careers. The *MDiplomaWorks* will not only benefit the individuals who receive a Diploma, but also help grow Maryland's economy through better earnings and constituent engagement.

Finally, the Department is requesting an amendment that strikes the GED Option Pilot Program. After continued work and discussions with the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), MD Labor believes that this program will benefit from more conversation and research in partnership with MSDE and other stakeholders.

The Department respectfully requests that the Committee issue a Favorable Report with amendment on HB297.

For questions, please contact Andrew Fulginiti, at **Andrew.Fulginiti@maryland.gov**.