



Testimony On House Bill 297 - Unfavorable

HB0297 - Adult Education – High School Diploma Pathways – GED Option Pilot Program and MDiplomaWorks Pathway

February 11th, 2026

The Maryland Alliance for Racial Equity in Education (MAREE), a coalition of over 30 education advocacy, civil rights, and community-based organizations committed to eliminating racial disparities, policies, and practices in Maryland's education system, **offers testimony in opposition to HB 297 - Adult Education – High School Diploma Pathways – GED Option Pilot Program and MDiplomaWorks Pathway.**

MAREE strongly believes that every child can excel in the classroom if given the right resources and support. Unfortunately, for far too long Black and Brown students have been asked to do more with less - stripped of opportunities and resources and then blamed when this underinvestment leads to worse academic outcomes. **HB297 threatens to deepen these inequities by funneling students of color or those labeled “at risk” into GED programs that don’t adequately prepare them for college or career.**

HB297 expands the GED Option Pilot Program by allowing up to 3 districts in the state to include students in their program whom they deem “at significant risk of not successfully completing high school”. These students are placed on a track towards obtaining their GED instead of a traditional high school diploma. **With no clear equity safeguards or stipulations in the bill regarding the criteria being used to identify students, MAREE has significant concerns about racial bias impacting which students will be selected for this program.**

The U.S. Education System has a long history of pushing Black and Brown students into alternative educational pathways that do not set them up for postsecondary or career success. Until recently, students of color were tracked into low-quality vocational programs that provided little if any academic enrichment or job prospects upon graduation. Today, Black and Brown students continue to be saddled with low expectations that can harm their self-image and impede their ability to see themselves as capable learners. Those students who are most disengaged from school or who perform poorly on assignments are even more likely to face this reality daily. These students are also most likely to be labeled “at risk” under this program, and funneled into a GED program that does not set them up for success.

Significant bodies of research show that students who earn their GED are less likely to enroll in, or complete, a postsecondary degree. Furthermore, those with a GED have lower average earnings than their peers with a traditional high school diploma. While a GED is a high-quality option for those removed from the education system completely or whose age makes re-enrolling in high school infeasible, **Maryland should not be deeming certain students unable to achieve a traditional high school diploma before they even disenroll from school.**

In recent years Maryland has made significant investments in our education system through the Blueprint for Maryland's Future. **Our state provides schools with funding and resources, and in return we expect our schools to adequately prepare our students for college or career. This bill would allow schools to rescind their responsibility in this exchange.** Schools would still receive money from the state to provide a student with a high-quality K-12 education, while in turn writing them off as unable to receive their diploma. This is unacceptable and does a disservice to every student who has been discounted by the adults who are supposed to believe in their success.

For these reasons, **MAREE urges the House Ways and Means Committee to issue an unfavorable report on HB 297.**

peace & truth,
sharlimar douglass
Education Justice Advocate & Analyst
Maryland Alliance for Racial Equity in Education (MAREE)