

HOUSE BILL 297

F5, K3

(PRE-FILED)

6lr0108
CF SB 70

By: **Chair, Ways and Means Committee (By Request – Departmental – Labor)**

Requested: September 16, 2025

Introduced and read first time: January 14, 2026

Assigned to: Ways and Means

Committee Report: Favorable with amendments

House action: Adopted

Read second time: February 28, 2026

CHAPTER _____

1 AN ACT concerning

2 **Adult Education – High School Diploma Pathways – ~~GED Option Pilot Program~~**
3 **~~and~~ MDiplomaWorks Pathway**

4 FOR the purpose of ~~establishing the GED Option Pilot Program; requiring the Maryland~~
5 ~~Department of Labor, in consultation with certain entities, to establish criteria to~~
6 ~~select certain local school systems to participate in the Pilot Program; establishing~~
7 ~~qualifications for certain students selected to participate in the Pilot Program;~~
8 establishing the MDiplomaWorks pathway as an alternative method of earning a
9 high school diploma in the State; and generally relating to adult education and high
10 school diploma pathways.

11 ~~BY repealing and reenacting, without amendments,~~
12 ~~Article – Labor and Employment~~
13 ~~Section 11–808(a)~~
14 ~~Annotated Code of Maryland~~
15 ~~(2025 Replacement Volume)~~

16 ~~BY repealing and reenacting, with amendments,~~
17 ~~Article – Labor and Employment~~
18 ~~Section 11–808(b)~~
19 ~~Annotated Code of Maryland~~
20 ~~(2025 Replacement Volume)~~

21 BY adding to

EXPLANATION: CAPITALS INDICATE MATTER ADDED TO EXISTING LAW.

[Brackets] indicate matter deleted from existing law.

Underlining indicates amendments to bill.

~~Strike out~~ indicates matter stricken from the bill by amendment or deleted from the law by amendment.



1 Article – Labor and Employment
 2 Section ~~11–808.1~~ and 11–810
 3 Annotated Code of Maryland
 4 (2025 Replacement Volume)

5 SECTION 1. BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF MARYLAND,
 6 That the Laws of Maryland read as follows:

7 ~~Article – Labor and Employment~~

8 ~~11–808.~~

9 ~~(a) An individual may obtain a high school diploma by examination as provided~~
 10 ~~in this section if the individual:~~

11 ~~(1) has not obtained a high school diploma;~~

12 ~~(2) resides in this State; and~~

13 ~~(3) except as provided in subsection (b) of this section:~~

14 ~~(i) is not subject to compulsory school attendance under § 7–301 of~~
 15 ~~the Education Article; and~~

16 ~~(ii) has withdrawn from a regular full-time public or private school~~
 17 ~~program.~~

18 ~~(b) An individual is not subject to the requirements of subsection (a)(3) of this~~
 19 ~~section if the individual participates in:~~

20 ~~(1) a GED Option Program administered by the State Department of~~
 21 ~~Education that creates a pathway to a high school diploma by examination for currently~~
 22 ~~enrolled high school English language learner students under the age of 21 years who have~~
 23 ~~experienced interrupted education and have a lower level of English proficiency than their~~
 24 ~~peers; OR~~

25 ~~(2) THE GED OPTION PILOT PROGRAM ESTABLISHED UNDER §~~
 26 ~~11–808.1 OF THIS SUBTITLE.~~

27 ~~11–808.1.~~

28 ~~(A) IN THIS SECTION, “PILOT PROGRAM” MEANS THE GED OPTION PILOT~~
 29 ~~PROGRAM.~~

30 ~~(B) (1) THERE IS A GED OPTION PILOT PROGRAM IN THE STATE.~~

1 ~~(2) THE PURPOSE OF THE PILOT PROGRAM IS TO EXPAND THE GED~~
2 ~~OPTION PROGRAM TO STUDENTS BEYOND ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS IN~~
3 ~~SELECTED SCHOOL DISTRICTS TO ENSURE THAT THE STUDENTS HAVE A PATHWAY~~
4 ~~TO OBTAIN A HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA AND ARE PREPARED TO ENTER~~
5 ~~POSTSECONDARY PROGRAMMING OR THE WORKFORCE.~~

6 ~~(C) THE PILOT PROGRAM SHALL BEGIN IN THE 2027-2028 SCHOOL YEAR~~
7 ~~AND SHALL CONTINUE FOR 2 SCHOOL YEARS.~~

8 ~~(D) THE DEPARTMENT:~~

9 ~~(1) IN CONSULTATION WITH THE STATE DEPARTMENT OF~~
10 ~~EDUCATION AND THE PUBLIC SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS' ASSOCIATION OF~~
11 ~~MARYLAND, SHALL DEVELOP CRITERIA, INCLUDING RECOGNITION OF GEOGRAPHIC~~
12 ~~DIVERSITY, FOR THE SELECTION OF AT LEAST THREE LOCAL SCHOOL SYSTEMS TO~~
13 ~~PARTICIPATE IN THE PILOT PROGRAM; AND~~

14 ~~(2) IN CONSULTATION WITH THE STATE DEPARTMENT OF~~
15 ~~EDUCATION, SHALL USE THE CRITERIA DEVELOPED UNDER ITEM (1) OF THIS~~
16 ~~SUBSECTION TO SELECT AT LEAST THREE LOCAL SCHOOL SYSTEMS TO PARTICIPATE~~
17 ~~IN THE PILOT PROGRAM.~~

18 ~~(E) EACH COUNTY SUPERINTENDENT FROM A PARTICIPATING LOCAL~~
19 ~~SCHOOL SYSTEM MAY SELECT UP TO 150 STUDENTS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE PILOT~~
20 ~~PROGRAM.~~

21 ~~(F) A STUDENT SELECTED TO PARTICIPATE IN THE PILOT PROGRAM:~~

22 ~~(1) MAY BEGIN THE GED OPTION PROGRAM WHEN THE STUDENT IS~~
23 ~~AT LEAST 17 YEARS OLD;~~

24 ~~(2) MUST BE AT SIGNIFICANT RISK OF NOT SUCCESSFULLY~~
25 ~~COMPLETING HIGH SCHOOL; AND~~

26 ~~(3) SHALL TAKE THE HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA BY EXAMINATION~~
27 ~~BEFORE THE CONCLUSION OF THE GED OPTION PROGRAM.~~

28 ~~(G) THE DEPARTMENT AND THE STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION~~
29 ~~SHALL EXPLORE OPTIONS FOR EXPANDING THE GED OPTION PROGRAM BASED ON~~
30 ~~RESULTS OF THE PILOT PROGRAM.~~

31 ~~(H) (1) ON OR BEFORE DECEMBER 1, 2028, AND DECEMBER 1, 2029, THE~~
32 ~~DEPARTMENT AND THE STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION JOINTLY SHALL~~

~~REPORT TO THE GOVERNOR AND, IN ACCORDANCE WITH § 2-1257 OF THE STATE GOVERNMENT ARTICLE, THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY REGARDING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PILOT PROGRAM.~~

~~(2) THE REPORT REQUIRED UNDER PARAGRAPH (1) OF THIS SUBSECTION SHALL INCLUDE:~~

~~(i) THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS PARTICIPATING IN THE PILOT PROGRAM FROM EACH PARTICIPATING LOCAL SCHOOL SYSTEM;~~

~~(ii) FEEDBACK FROM EDUCATORS, STUDENTS, AND PARENTS OF STUDENTS PARTICIPATING IN THE PILOT PROGRAM ON WAYS TO IMPROVE THE GED OPTION PROGRAM;~~

~~(iii) THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS WHO EARNED A HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA AS A RESULT OF COMPLETING THE PILOT PROGRAM; AND~~

~~(iv) AN EVALUATION OF THE PILOT PROGRAM AND THE GED OPTION PROGRAM WITH ANY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENTS.~~

~~(i) THE DEPARTMENT AND THE STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION JOINTLY MAY ADOPT REGULATIONS TO IMPLEMENT THE PILOT PROGRAM.~~

~~SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That the Laws of Maryland read as follows:~~

Article – Labor and Employment

11-810.

(A) IN THIS SECTION, “MDIPLOMAWORKS PATHWAY” MEANS AN ALTERNATIVE PATHWAY TO EARN A HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA IN THE STATE.

(B) THE MDIPLOMAWORKS PATHWAY IS A METHOD TO RECOGNIZE AND CERTIFY HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA ACHIEVEMENT THROUGH DEMONSTRATED ACADEMIC AND CAREER COMPETENCIES, INCLUDING WORKFORCE EXPERIENCE.

(C) AN INDIVIDUAL MAY OBTAIN A HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA THROUGH THE MDIPLOMAWORKS PATHWAY IF THE INDIVIDUAL:

(1) HAS NOT OBTAINED A HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA;

(2) RESIDES IN THE STATE;

1 **(3) IS NOT SUBJECT TO THE COMPULSORY SCHOOL ATTENDANCE**
2 **REQUIREMENT UNDER § 7-301 OF THE EDUCATION ARTICLE; AND**

3 **(4) HAS WITHDRAWN FROM A REGULAR FULL-TIME PUBLIC OR**
4 **PRIVATE SCHOOL PROGRAM.**

5 **(D) TO EARN A HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA THROUGH THE MDIPLOMAWORKS**
6 **PATHWAY, AN INDIVIDUAL SHALL DEMONSTRATE EQUIVALENCY TO A MARYLAND**
7 **HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA BY COMPLETION OF A COMBINATION OF THE FOLLOWING**
8 **COMPONENTS AS APPROVED BY THE DEPARTMENT:**

9 **(1) EARNING INDUSTRY-RECOGNIZED CREDENTIALS;**

10 **(2) DEMONSTRATING FOUNDATIONAL ACADEMIC SKILLS THROUGH**
11 **FORMAL ASSESSMENTS;**

12 **(3) COMPLETING CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION**
13 **COURSEWORK; AND**

14 **(4) COMPLETING AN ON-THE-JOB LEARNING EXPERIENCE.**

15 **(E) A HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA SHALL BE AWARDED TO AN INDIVIDUAL WHO**
16 **COMPLETES THE MDIPLOMAWORKS PATHWAY IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE**
17 **REGULATIONS ADOPTED BY THE SECRETARY AND THE STATE BOARD OF**
18 **EDUCATION.**

19 SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That the Maryland Department of
20 Labor shall publish on its website, and include in any publications that describe how adults
21 may obtain a high school diploma, information on the MDiplomaWorks pathway
22 established under § 11-810 of the Labor and Employment Article, as enacted by Section 1
23 of this Act, in order to inform potentially eligible applicants about the new pathway to
24 obtain a high school diploma.

25 SECTION 3. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That this Act shall take effect
26 October 1, 2026. ~~Section 1 of this Act shall remain effective for a period of 4 years and, at~~
27 ~~the end of September 30, 2030, Section 1 of this Act, with no further action required by the~~
28 ~~General Assembly, shall be abrogated and of no further force and effect.~~