

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

A BILL ENTITLED

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
22 Article – Labor and Employment
23 Section 11–808.1 and 11–810
24 Annotated Code of Maryland
25 (2025 Replacement Volume)

EXPLANATION: CAPITALS INDICATE MATTER ADDED TO EXISTING LAW.

[Brackets] indicate matter deleted from existing law.



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

Article – Labor and Employment

11–808.

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

(1) has not obtained a high school diploma;

(2) resides in this State; and

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

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

(ii) has withdrawn from a regular full–time public or private school program.

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

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

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

11–808.1.

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

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

(2) THE PURPOSE OF THE PILOT PROGRAM IS TO EXPAND THE GED OPTION PROGRAM TO STUDENTS BEYOND ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS IN SELECTED SCHOOL DISTRICTS TO ENSURE THAT THE STUDENTS HAVE A PATHWAY

1 TO OBTAIN A HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA AND ARE PREPARED TO ENTER
2 POSTSECONDARY PROGRAMMING OR THE WORKFORCE.

3 (C) THE PILOT PROGRAM SHALL BEGIN IN THE 2027–2028 SCHOOL YEAR
4 AND SHALL CONTINUE FOR 2 SCHOOL YEARS.

5 (D) THE DEPARTMENT:

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

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

15 (E) EACH COUNTY SUPERINTENDENT FROM A PARTICIPATING LOCAL
16 SCHOOL SYSTEM MAY SELECT UP TO 150 STUDENTS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE PILOT
17 PROGRAM.

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

19 (1) MAY BEGIN THE GED OPTION PROGRAM WHEN THE STUDENT IS
20 AT LEAST 17 YEARS OLD;

21 (2) MUST BE AT SIGNIFICANT RISK OF NOT SUCCESSFULLY
22 COMPLETING HIGH SCHOOL; AND

23 (3) SHALL TAKE THE HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA BY EXAMINATION
24 BEFORE THE CONCLUSION OF THE GED OPTION PROGRAM.

25 (G) THE DEPARTMENT AND THE STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
26 SHALL EXPLORE OPTIONS FOR EXPANDING THE GED OPTION PROGRAM BASED ON
27 RESULTS OF THE PILOT PROGRAM.

28 (H) (1) ON OR BEFORE DECEMBER 1, 2028, AND DECEMBER 1, 2029, THE
29 DEPARTMENT AND THE STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION JOINTLY SHALL
30 REPORT TO THE GOVERNOR AND, IN ACCORDANCE WITH § 2–1257 OF THE STATE
31 GOVERNMENT ARTICLE, THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY REGARDING THE
32 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;

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

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

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

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

8 **(2) DEMONSTRATING FOUNDATIONAL ACADEMIC SKILLS THROUGH**
9 **FORMAL ASSESSMENTS;**

10 **(3) COMPLETING CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION**
11 **COURSEWORK; AND**

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

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

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