Department of Legislative Services

Maryland General Assembly
2026 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
Enrolled - Revised

Senate Bill 70 (Chair, Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee)(By Request - Departmental - Labor)

Education, Energy, and the Environment | Ways and Means

Adult Education - High School Diploma Pathways - MDiplomaWorks Pathway

This departmental bill establishes the MDiplomaWorks (MDW) Pathway within the Maryland Department of Labor (MD Labor) to recognize and certify high school diploma achievement through demonstrated academic and career competencies, including workforce experience. The bill also (1) establishes eligibility for participation in the pathway; (2) requires a high school diploma to be awarded to an individual who completes the MDW Pathway in accordance with regulations adopted by MD Labor and the State Board of Education; and (3) requires MD Labor to publicize the MDW Pathway as specified.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: MD Labor can implement and publicize the MDW Pathway with existing resources. The Maryland State Department of Education can likely collaborate with MD Labor on the development of the MDW Pathway with existing resources. State education aid is not affected as MDW Pathway participants are not enrolled in public schools and therefore are not included in enrollment counts used to determine State aid. Revenues are not affected.

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: MD Labor has determined that this bill has a meaningful impact on small business (attached). The Department of Legislative Services concurs with this assessment. (The attached assessment does not reflect amendments to the bill.)

Analysis

Bill Summary: Individuals eligible to obtain a high school diploma through the MDW Pathway must not have obtained a high school diploma, reside in the state, not be subject to the compulsory school attendance requirement, and have withdrawn from a regular full-time public or private school program.

To earn a diploma through the MDW Pathway, an individual must demonstrate equivalency to a Maryland high school diploma by completion of a combination of four components as approved by MD Labor, including (1) earning industry-recognized credentials; (2) demonstrating foundational academic skills through formal assessments; (3) completing career and technical education coursework; and (4) completing an on-the-job learning experience. A high school diploma must be awarded to an individual who completes the MDW pathway in accordance with the regulations adopted by the Secretary of Labor and the Maryland State Board of Education.

In calendar 2027 and 2028, MD Labor must publish on its website, and include in any publications that describe how adults may obtain a high school diploma, information on the MDW Pathway to inform potentially eligible applicants about the new pathway to obtain a high school diploma.

Current Law/Background: There are currently three alternative pathways through which individuals can obtain a high school diploma outside of traditional K-12 schooling in Maryland. Individuals can either (1) take the GED test, consisting of four different modules including Mathematical Reasoning, Reasoning through Language Arts, Social Studies, and Science; (2) complete the National External Diploma Program (NEDP), which is completed working independently on a series of assigned tasks or competencies on computer, at their own pace, while meeting periodically with a trained NEDP assessor to develop a portfolio that proves that they have acquired the skills required to be awarded a Maryland High School Diploma; or (3) attend one of Maryland's two adult high schools that offer adults 21 years and older the opportunity to earn a high school diploma based on the Maryland High School Graduation Requirements and potentially earn a post-secondary credit or an industry-recognized credential.

A Maryland resident may obtain a high school diploma by examination (GED) if the individual is at least 18 years old and has not obtained a high school diploma. To qualify, the individual must have withdrawn from a regular full-time public or private school program.

MD Labor advises that there are nearly 500,000 Marylanders who do not have a high school diploma, which often prevents them from accessing quality jobs and job training programs like registered apprenticeships.

Additional Information

Recent Prior Introductions: Similar legislation has not been introduced within the last three years.

Designated Cross File: HB 297 (Chair, Ways and Means Committee)(By Request - Departmental - Labor) - Ways and Means.
Information Source(s): Maryland State Department of Education; Maryland Department of Labor; Baltimore City Public Schools; Baltimore County Public Schools; Montgomery County Public Schools; Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - January 27, 2026
jg/mcr Third Reader - March 21, 2026
Revised - Amendment(s) - March 21, 2026
Enrolled - May 1, 2026
Revised - Amendment(s) - May 1, 2026

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ANALYSIS OF ECONOMIC IMPACT ON SMALL BUSINESSES

TITLE OF BILL: Adult Education - High School Diploma Pathways - MDiplomaWorks Pathway

BILL NUMBER: SB 70

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PART A. ECONOMIC IMPACT RATING

This agency estimates that the proposed bill:

__ WILL HAVE MINIMAL OR NO ECONOMIC IMPACT ON MARYLAND SMALL BUSINESS

OR

_X_ WILL HAVE MEANINGFUL ECONOMIC IMPACT ON MARYLAND SMALL BUSINESSES

PART B. ECONOMIC IMPACT ANALYSIS

The attached proposal is likely to have a meaningful positive impact on Maryland's small businesses. Many of MD Labor's quality job training programs, including Registered Apprenticeship, require participants to have an HSD. Upon completion of these programs, participants leave with an industry-recognized credential and hands-on experience in a skilled occupation. By increasing the ability of individuals to earn an HSD, the attached proposal would increase the number of individuals qualified for RA and other similar job training programs, subsequently increasing the pool of skilled workers available to small businesses.