



Maryland State Board of Education

200 WEST BALTIMORE ST. / BALTIMORE, MD 21201-2595 / (410) 767-0467

February 4, 2019

The Honorable Paul G. Pinsky, Chair
Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401 - 1991

Re: Senate Bill 267 – AP Opportunities Act of 2020

Dear Chair Pinsky:

The State Board of Education (State Board) submits this letter in support of Senate Bill (SB) 267 – AP Opportunities Act of 2020, which requires the State Board to provide AP examination fee assistance for students whose annual household income is at or below 185 of the federal poverty level.

As you are aware, Advanced Placement (AP) offers academically talented students access to high-quality and rigorous curricula, and a pathway to higher education. Unfortunately, data indicate that students have uneven access to AP opportunities, as students in smaller and rural school districts and students of color are less likely to have access to or participate in AP courses.

The State Board and the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) are committed to providing Maryland students with equitable access to high-quality instruction, curriculum, and support to ensure career, college, and civic readiness. Recently, the State Board adopted new regulations establishing educational equity as a policy priority for the MSDE and local school systems. The MSDE has also published a *Guide to Equity and Excellence* to assist local school systems in ensuring all students have equitable access to educational opportunities, to include AP and IB.

In 2017, Maryland launched the *Lead Higher Initiative*, which is designed to close equity gaps and expand access to Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) courses for lower income students and students of color. As the MSDE continues to identify and engage school systems in this initiative, it will also be important to ensure that students who complete the courses are able to take the exams necessary to earn college credit and placement. AP exam fees can present a serious barrier, particularly for disadvantaged students. The most recent data on Maryland's AP Exam Results (2018) revealed that while FARMS students represent 36% of Maryland's high school total enrollment, they represent only 14% of the 2018 AP exams taken in that same year.

Passage of this bill would eliminate financial barriers to AP exam participation by providing fee assistance for students who demonstrate financial need. The bill also aligns with the State Board and the MSDE's equity priorities, and complements the mission of the Lead Higher Initiative to increase opportunity and access for economically disadvantaged students

For the reasons cited above, the State Board supports this legislation. For additional information or questions, please contact Ms. Tiffany Clark at (410) 767-0469, or tiffany.clark1@maryland.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Warner I. Sumpter".

Brigadier General Warner I Sumpter (Ret.)
President, Maryland State Board of Education

cc: Karen B. Salmon, Ph.D., State Superintendent of Schools
Tiffany Johnson Clark