

Good afternoon Chair and members of the committee, my name is Chike Aguh, my family and I proudly call Prince George's County home and I serve as the founder of BLUEM (Business Leaders United for Education in Maryland). We are a group of rising business leaders starting our careers and businesses in the state and who passionately believe that excellent and equitable education for all is the key to Maryland's economic future. We are also proud members of the Maryland Alliance for Racial Equity in Education for that same reason. It is with that belief that we stand in strong support of HB1421 to automatically enroll students who show aptitude for advanced coursework.

To say why let me start with a story, it starts in the late 1950s in Nigeria, right before the British abandoned it as a colony. It started in the far east of the country, in a small nondescript village that most Nigerians themselves would never go to and never visit. The story started in that village with a young boy and young girl who grew up right over the hill from one another and whose parents never had any formal education past middle school. That boy and that girl lived through poverty and a civil war that took people close to them. That boy and that girl grew up with Peace Corps volunteers in their classrooms. They ended up coming to America, getting married, making a life as a doctor and accountant respectively, and having four children, the oldest of whom is giving testimony before this committee right now.

What made their lives and by extension my life possible was that they were both tapped on the shoulders by adults who believed in them and who got them to apply for college and scholarships in the United States. Without that tap, I would not be sitting in front of you right now. Today in Maryland, there are many children who are not getting that tap on the shoulder and we as a state and a country are suffering for it. In Maryland last year, we likely had thousands of students who could have taken advanced coursework who did not get the opportunity because of the barrier of a teacher's recommendation stood in their way. This disproportionately impacts black and brown students and, according to the Education Trust, this is even true when those students have the scores to do the work. These are future doctors, lawyers, engineers, computer scientists, entrepreneurs and other leaders that our state are losing. This is in a day and age when we can't afford it. Take this one example, China and India will over the next decade graduate more STEM professionals than America has people. For the sake of our businesses and our future, we don't have a student to waste. To continue to let that tap on the shoulder be a barrier to advanced coursework is morally indefensible, economically irresponsible and geopolitically reckless.

I end where I began. If we want more stories like mine, we need to pass HB 1421. More important, if we do this here, we can ensure that stories like mine don't just stay stories but become the reality for every student in our great state.



Chike Aguh
Business Leaders United for Education in Maryland (BLUEM), Founder

Chike Aguh (Chee-kay Ah-Goo) is a Senior Principal and Director of Strategy at McChrystal Group, a firm founded by Gen. Stanley McChrystal, which focuses on transforming clients into adaptable 21st Century organizations. Past clients include Cisco, Under Armour and renowned cancer center MD Anderson. In this role, Chike creates and delivers new offerings to help organizations better implement their strategies. He also serves as the McChrystal Group's lead and subject matter expert on the future of work. As a term member at the Council of Foreign Relations (CFR), member of CFR's Taskforce on the Future of the US Workforce, and inaugural Future of Work Fellow at the International Society for Technology in Education, Chike writes and speaks nationally on the future of work, particularly the impacts on and opportunities for and underserved communities.

Previously, he worked as an education policy official under the Mayor of New York, a 2nd grade teacher and Teach For America corps member, a Fulbright Scholar in Thailand, a director of corporate strategy at the Advisory Board Company, and CEO of a national social enterprise which has helped connect 500,000 low-income Americans in 48 states to affordable internet and digital skills. Chike also worked with the Massachusetts Secretary of Education, US Department of Education, and the federal government's Performance Improvement Council. He is also a partner at Inncuvate, a Maryland firm growing innovation businesses and ecosystems, particularly in communities that need them most.

Chike holds degrees from Tufts University (B.A.), the Harvard Graduate School of Education (Ed.M), the Harvard Kennedy School of Government (MPA), and the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School (MBA). He is a 2018 TIAA/CREF Difference Maker, 2017 Presidential Leadership Scholar, Washington Business Journal 40 under 40 honoree, Wharton 40 under 40 honoree, Prince George's County 40 under 40 honoree, and past member of the Harvard Kennedy School of Government's/alumni Board of Directors. He has spoken at, been featured in, and/or interviewed by the White House, Harvard University, SXSWEdU, CNNMoney, Forbes, US News and World Report, Wired Magazine, and Fast Company. Chike lives in Glenn Dale, MD with his wife and their son.