

Testimonial_RaheelAhmad_SB0630_GeneralAssembly.pdf

Uploaded by: Ahmad, Raheel

Position: FAV

Bill Number: SB0630
Name: Raheel Ahmad
Position: Support / Favorable

Dear Members of the Maryland General Assembly:

I, Raheel Ahmad, wish to write a letter in support of the bill SB0630, which would enable the continued financial support of specific Adult High School Pilot Programs in important locations in Maryland.

To begin, I would like to share my background in education and my family's struggle with educational access. In my family, there have been instances of multiple severe mental illnesses, that through medical mismanagement, led to a deteriorating financial crisis and social crisis in my home. Later on, while I was a student in university, my younger brother was left alone at home to complete high school in this environment. Subsequently, he did not complete all requirements and would not receive a diploma. After recognizing this, I mobilized my other siblings to lend support, motivation, hope, and a secure financial bed for my younger brother to lean on to go back to complete his diploma requirements. Ultimately, his potential has not yet been wasted.

I tell this story to highlight that without these essential aspects of support and involvement by someone external to my brother's struggles, he would not have been successful. Similarly, I believe that the establishment and continued growth of an Adult High School will provide a path to those that feel they also have no avenue to success post-teenage life. I believe those that will seek out the training available at the Adult High School level will have similar experiences to my own, by which they have lost support, motivation, and a financial ability. Critically, the continued support of an Adult High School provides hope for individuals perceiving they have limitations due to their backgrounds. I believe this is the most important aspect of the program relevant to their success.

As an educator and mentor, I recognize the necessity of specific services an Adult High School – such as the one operated by the group elev8 Baltimore – provides, including services related to mental health, childcare, workforce development, housing, and family engagement. Previously, due to my academic achievements in university, I was able to give back by first becoming a teaching assistant for those underrepresented in science (courses: organic chemistry, genetics). Later on, I had the opportunity to teach my own seminar course in chemistry that allowed me to engage with diverse students and their perspectives. Through these interactions, my understanding and reliance on support outside the classroom developed. Now, as a researcher in the Children's Center at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine in the division of Pediatric Surgery and as a member of the Baltimore City Children's Cabinet Literacy Workgroup, every day it dawns on me more and more the compounding issues that place individuals in positions prevent them from achieving their goals, such as finishing high school or joining the workforce productively. In my mind, this places the services of an Adult High School as non-negotiable.

It is my hope that we all recognize the necessity and relevance of an Adult High School, especially in the Baltimore City area. From my understanding, elev8 Baltimore, an organization that could receive funding through bill SB0630, is led by committed members, such as their executive director: Alexandria Warrick-Adams. Alexandria is a dedicated person that has promptly participated in Children's Cabinet Literacy Workgroup, and I am confident Alexandria will show similar resolve for the success of an Adult High School. Furthermore, through strong ties to the Cherry Hill Community and collaborations with Baltimore City Community College, I know that the Adult High School program led by elev8 Baltimore stands to have a high chance of success.

In closing, I would like to offer my full support of the bill SB0630 as proposed by Senator Ferguson on financially funding for Adult High School Pilot programs.

Sincerely,
Raheel Ahmad
Phone: 856-359-4454; Email: razofera@gmail.com

SB 630 - Adult High School Funding BT Testimony_BF

Uploaded by: Ferguson, Senate President Bill

Position: FAV



The Senate of Maryland
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401-1991

SB 630 - Education - Adult High School Pilot Program - Funding and Grants

Testimony of Senate President Bill Ferguson

On February 17, 2021

Before the Budget and Taxation Committee

Why This Bill Matters:

A high school diploma is increasingly a prerequisite for employment, postsecondary education, and access to industry-recognized trade certification training opportunities. However, a 2019 report by the U.S. Census Bureau estimates that 10% of Maryland's population over the age of 18 do not have a high school diploma, effectively limiting career pathways that would otherwise exist. In Baltimore City alone, it is estimated that an individual with a high school diploma or equivalent credential earns about \$7,000, or 33%, more per year than an individual without one.

This obvious mismatch between requisite educational attainment and postsecondary or employment opportunities led the Maryland General Assembly to pass Senate Bill 866/House Bill 1381 in 2017 to establish the Adult High School Pilot Program. The 2017 legislation authorized the licensing of six adult high schools throughout the State that are designed to provide a pathway for adults without a high school diploma to continue their education and work towards earning a secondary degree.

As noted by a recent report released by the Maryland Department of Labor and Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), the need for fully operational adult high schools has only become more urgent with the impacts of COVID-19, resulting economic hardship, and increased competition for employment. The report notes that, "[t]he disproportionate negative economic impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on adults in need of adult literacy, high school diplomas, and employment in Maryland underscores the imperative to protect and promote access to adult education resources such as those provided through the [Adult High School Pilot] Program."

Unfortunately, the two approved operators of Adult High School programs in Maryland have been unable to secure the necessary funding to open their respective schools and begin earnestly serving prospective students.

What This Bill Does:

Senate Bill 630 expands funding for the Adult High School Pilot Program by mandating a \$250,000 appropriation in FY2022 and \$500,000 appropriation in every year following to ensure that the

existing approved operators have the needed funding to serve potential students.

Why You Should Vote For This Bill:

At a time when the need for adult educational pathways is increasingly critical, Maryland should be doing everything possible to support Adult High School program operators who have already been approved and are ready to begin opening their doors to students. The Maryland Department of Labor and MSDE report referenced above also notes that securing philanthropic dollars for these programs has been difficult without public investment, but that is likely to change if the Maryland General Assembly passes Senate Bill 630.

Adult High Schools have the potential to provide high-quality secondary education and access to career training for an estimated 500,000 Maryland adults without a high school diploma. A robust curriculum has been developed and approved, and critical wraparound services have been identified to further support students. Now is the time for Maryland to take the next step and invest in these vital programs to get them from concept to operation.

Thank you for your consideration of Senate Bill 630 and I urge the committee to move this bill with a favorable report.

SB0630-02.17.21.--Education - Adult High School Pi

Uploaded by: Fry, Donald

Position: FAV



TESTIMONY PRESENTED TO THE SENATE BUDGET & TAXATION COMMITTEE

**SENATE BILL 630 - EDUCATION - ADULT HIGH SCHOOL PILOT PROGRAM –
FUNDING AND GRANTS**

Sponsor – Senator Ferguson

February 17, 2021

**DONALD C. FRY
PRESIDENT & CEO
GREATER BALTIMORE COMMITTEE**

Position: Support

The Greater Baltimore Committee (GBC) supports Senate Bill 630, which mandates funding beginning in fiscal year 2022 for the Adult High School Pilot Program. In addition, the bill requires that a \$250,000 grant be provided to a pilot proposal that was approved prior to January 1, 2021 and would provide instruction at a building located in the Cherry Hill neighborhood of Baltimore City.

The Adult High School Pilot Program was created in 2017 to provide an alternative method for adults who did not graduate from high school to earn a high school diploma and potentially earn postsecondary education credits and industry-recognized certification in an environment that meets the needs of the adult learner. Any such school would be required to provide wraparound services to students and their families.

The funding required by Senate Bill 630 aligns with the GBC *2021 Maryland General Assembly Legislative Priorities* as well as the recommendations of the GBC report, *Preparing for the Future: A Regional Workforce Development Initiative*, which both advocate for additional state funds for adult basic education and workforce training. In addition, the GBC is actively implementing the recommendations of the *Preparing the Future* report to ensure that the Baltimore region's workforce is trained to meet the region's workforce needs over the next decade.

Finally, SB 630 is also consistent with one of the core pillars in the GBC report *Gaining A Competitive Edge: Keys to Economic Growth and Job Creation* which identified as a condition for a competitive business environment and job growth:

Workforce that is highly educated and meets Maryland's business needs. Maryland's secondary and higher education institutions must offer access to quality instruction at all levels and cultivate a workforce that is well-suited to a modern economy and to the specific needs of Maryland's business sectors.

For these reasons, the Greater Baltimore Committee urges a favorable report on Senate Bill 630.

The Greater Baltimore Committee (GBC) is a non-partisan, independent, regional business advocacy organization comprised of hundreds of businesses -- large, medium and small -- educational institutions, nonprofit organizations and foundations located in Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Carroll, Harford, and Howard counties as well as Baltimore City. The GBC is a 66-year-old, private-sector membership organization with a rich legacy of working with government to find solutions to problems that negatively affect our competitiveness and viability.

GREATER BALTIMORE COMMITTEE

111 South Calvert Street • Suite 1700 • Baltimore, Maryland • 21202-6180

(410) 727-2820 • www.gbc.org

MAP - SB630- Adult High School- Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Jefferson , Stacey

Position: FAV



Member Agencies:

Advocates for Children and Youth
Baltimore Jewish Council
Behavioral Health System Baltimore
CASH Campaign of Maryland
Catholic Charities
Episcopal Diocese of Maryland
Family League of Baltimore
Fuel Fund of Maryland
Health Care for the Homeless
Homeless Persons
Representation Project
Job Opportunities Task Force
League of Women Voters of Maryland
Loyola University Maryland
Maryland Catholic Conference
Maryland Center on Economic Policy
Maryland Community Action
Partnership
Maryland Family Network
Maryland Hunger Solutions
Paul's Place
Public Justice Center
St. Vincent de Paul of Baltimore
Welfare Advocates

Marylanders Against Poverty

Stacey Jefferson, Co-Chair
P: 410-637-1900 ext 8578
C: 443-813-9231

E: stacey.jefferson@bhsbaltimore.org

Julia Gross, Co-Chair
P: 410-528-0021x6029
E: jgross@mdhungersolutions.org

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 630

Education – Adult High School Pilot Program – Funding and Grants

Senate Budget and Taxation Committee

February 17, 2021

Submitted by Stacey Jefferson and Julia Gross, Co-Chairs

Marylanders Against Poverty (MAP) supports SB 630, which requires the Governor to appropriate money - \$250,000 in FY 22, and \$500,000 in FY 2023 – which can be used to provide grants to organizations to create pilot adult high school programs.

Funds for advancing adult education are critical. Too many Marylanders are still struggling to secure full-time employment and build economic security, especially as we struggle to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. Adult education and effective workforce development are crucial to Maryland's ability to re-employ individuals who are out of work and to train new workers to meet the skills and qualifications that current employers demand. Without basic reading and math skills, adults are less employable, less civically engaged, and less involved with their children's schooling.¹ Access to job training, affordable adult high school options, literacy services, and continuing education are paramount to promoting productive functioning in work and in our communities.

The Adult High School Pilot Program creates an alternative pathway for adults to gain education who did not previously graduate from high school. Over 10% of adults in Maryland do not have their high school diploma or GED.² Folks without a high school diploma are three times more likely to be unemployed than college graduates, and when they are employed, earn \$8,000 per year less than folks with a high school diploma and \$26,500 less than those with a college degree.³ Adult high school programs are an essential lifeline for adult learners as they provide academic services in the pursuit of a high school diploma, opportunities for post-secondary education, job training, industry recognized credentials, and wraparound services that can address challenges. Adult high schools give the tools and skills low-income adults need to realize their career aspirations.

The Adult High School Pilot Program was created by legislation in 2017, but does not have dedicated funding. Unfortunately, the goals and promise of adult high schools in Maryland has not been realized as there is no dedicated funding for the pilot program. SB 630 requires the Governor to provide an appropriation to the adult high school pilot program, and these funds will be utilized to create adult high schools. This is a smart investment for the state: a qualified, educated workforce fortifies our state's economy and reduces state costs in safety-net programming, health care, and public safety.⁴

MAP appreciates your consideration, and urges a favorable report on SB 630.

Marylanders Against Poverty (MAP) is a coalition of service providers, faith communities, and advocacy organizations advancing statewide public policies and programs necessary to alleviate the burdens faced by Marylanders living in or near poverty, and to address the underlying systemic causes of poverty.

¹ Greater Homewood Community Center. (2014). *Adult Education*. <http://www.greaterhomewood.org/our-work/adult-learning-center/>

² US Census Bureau. American Community Survey. 2020

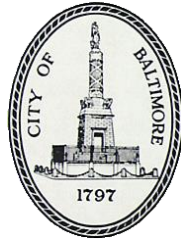
³ Alliance for Excellent Education. 2020. <https://all4ed.org/take-action/action-academy/the-economic-case-for-reducing-the-high-school-dropout-rate/>

⁴ Ibid

SB0630-B&T-FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Mehu, Natasha

Position: FAV



BRANDON M. SCOTT
MAYOR

*Office of Government Relations
88 State Circle
Annapolis, Maryland 21401*

SB 630

February 17, 2021

TO: Members of the Budget & Taxation Committee

FROM: Natasha Mehu, Director of Government Relations

RE: Senate Bill 630 – Education – Adult High School Pilot Program – Funds and Granting

POSITION: Support

Chair Guy Guzzone, Vice Chair James Rosapepe, and Members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) **supports** Senate Bill (SB) 630.

SB 630 authorizes the Adult High School Pilot Program to provide grants to certain pilots; defining ""pilot" as an adult high school established by an operator under the Program and requires the Governor to include an appropriation of \$250,000 in the fiscal year 2022 budget and an appropriation of \$500,000 in the fiscal year 2023 budget for the Program.

In Baltimore city there is estimated over 60,000 adults over the age of 18 that do not have a high school diploma, and although many enroll in alternative adult diploma programs, very few of them are able to earn their high school diploma. A large number of these same individuals have a literacy level below 9th grade, which contributes to their lack of persistence in alternative adult education programs, such as G.E.D. preparation programs. The adoption of adult high school programs by the state as an alternative pathway for residents to receive their high school diploma marks a recognition of the need for programs that have strategic wrap around supports to alleviate barriers to success, including: mental health, child care, academic interventions, and dual enrollment in high school and industry recognized certifications.

The South Baltimore Adult High School is an institution founded on the community school model to provide a pathway to a diploma and career advancement for adult learners as they achieve College and Career Readiness Standards. Core education services for the school will be provided by Baltimore City Community College, to include a continuum of academic and career development services to meet the needs of the adult learner. In addition to the high school pathway to success, the campus will also offer additional services traditionally available to adult learners. This includes: Adult Basic Education, English as a Second Language, GED®,

*Annapolis – phone: 410.269.0207 • fax: 410.269.6785
Baltimore – phone: 410.396.3497 • fax: 410.396.5136
<https://mogr.baltimorecity.gov/>*

Workforce Development and Career Technology Education (CTE) Programs, and Dual enrollment and transition to college certificate and degree programs. Learner supports and community engagement are an essential component of the South Baltimore Adult High School. Elev8 Baltimore, Inc. (Elev8), The Cherry Hill Development Corporation (CHDC), and other community partners will provide wraparound services to assist in removing student barriers.

The Mayor's Office of Children & Family Success supports the South Baltimore Adult High School as a critical element in the landscape of opportunities for adults to continue their education & access opportunities to meet their potential. The Baltimore Children's Cabinet has also named support for the adult high school as a key priority for 2021.

We respectfully request a **favorable** report on Senate Bill 630.

SB0630 MD NARAL SUPPORT.pdf

Uploaded by: Philip, Diana

Position: FAV



SB0630 – Education – Adult High School Pilot Program -Funding and Grants

Presented to the Hon. Guy Guzzone and Members of the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
February 17, 2021 1:00 p.m.

POSITION: SUPPORT

NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland urges Members of the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee to issue a **favorable report on SB0630 – Education – Adult High School Pilot Program -Funding and Grants**, sponsored by Senator Bill Ferguson.

Our organization is an advocate for reproductive health, rights, and justice. We work to ensure every child-bearing individual has the right to decide if, when, and how to form their families and to parent in good health, in safety, and with dignity. Youth have the same rights as adults in choosing when to form their families. Our organization seeks to help identify and create effective systems of support to help pregnant and parenting students stay in school, remain on track to graduate, and work towards economic security. In 2016, we testified in support of SB1173, which established a task force to determine how the state could best create adult high school pilot projects, to support students who dropped out or were pushed out of school, unable to obtain their diplomas with their cohorts, but committed to the goal of one day doing so.

In 2017, the Maryland General Assembly passed HB0616, which established excused absences for pregnant and parenting students for medical and legal reasons. HB0616 also clarified that although pregnancy is not an illness, it is a medical event that requires reasonable time off from school to address prenatal needs and postpartum recovery without being unfairly subjected to truancy allegations or school pushout. It is essential that pregnant, expectant, and parenting students should have access to resources to support their both educational and parenting goals. A Gates Foundation study found that approximately half of female dropouts reported that pregnancy or becoming a parent played a role in their decisions to leave school¹. The same was true for almost one-third of male dropouts. These statistics can be attributed to “school pushout”; a phenomenon in which students feel so disenfranchised due to a lack of resources and support in their schools that they actually feel pressured to drop out². Captured in our state’s vital statistics is the fact that 2,645 teenagers under the age of 19 gave birth in Maryland in 2018³. We can speculate that among these 2,645 youth are students in need of additional resources to continue pursuing their education while likely parenting for the first time – as well as their co-parents.

While we currently have no information about graduation rates for Maryland pregnant, expectant, and parenting students, we know from speaking with former and current students, school faculty and staff, and community advocates that the potential wanes without proper resources or support. As we attempt to address

¹ National Women’s Law Center: A Pregnancy Test for Schools Report (2012).

² Don’t Get Pushed Out. Know Your Rights! Retrieved from <https://www.mdsuspensionrep.org/know-your-rights>

³ Power to Decide: The Campaign to End Unplanned Pregnancy (2018). Retrieved from <https://powertodecide.org/what-we-do/information/national-state-data/maryland>

the lack of data collection on educational outcomes and how we can best address barriers to obtaining high school diplomas, we need to explore how we can recapture students in their adulthood that want to be back in school and on track to graduate. Under Title IX, these students share the same rights to opportunities for a rigorous education as their non-parenting peers.

Title IX guarantees students their full access to education without discrimination based on sex and gender, which includes pregnant, expectant and parenting youth. As we work to help guide and support school districts to create policies for schools to provide reasonable accommodations— like helping to make connections to childcare and transportation among existing community resources, as well as creating appropriate space to support lactation needs and excused time away from class to pump – there needs to be high schools to assist those that felt there was no alternative than to quit school and try again later.

We strongly urge that this SB0630 be passed this year, as it has come to our attention that better coordination of access to childcare resources for these students would have been very beneficial, and is still a serious problem, during the COVID-19 pandemic. The remote learning mandate has not only challenged working parents faced with scarce childcare options, but new parenting students struggling with caring for their own children while engaged in online learning – and also tasked with caring for other children that may be in the same household. Our organization contacted the 24 school districts in August and again in October to see what measures were being developed to assist these students with connecting them to childcare resources. Unfortunately, we are not aware of any school district that created a plan to assist these youth, and we greatly fear that Maryland will see a subsequent heightened school drop-out rate of this population of students as a result. The federal funding offered to the state mandated priority to working parents seeking childcare assistance, but not parenting students. Too many students already report challenges in applying for the childcare subsidies before the pandemic, finding the forms too complicated as well as the appeal process. Although there are regional navigation and childcare networks that exist, and are ready to assist these youth with seeking childcare centers and subsidies, but the connections need to be made. Lack of childcare is the number one reason why parenting students quit school. We fear that that parenting students in AY2021 will not be coming back. Anything we can do to increase the number of educational sites with wrap around support services and case management where people can obtain high school diplomas – no matter the reason why they left school – would be a great investment for the state.

Pregnant and parenting students often report having a renewed sense of commitment to their educational outcomes, knowing full well that high school diplomas will lead to better employment prospects in order to adequately care for the families they are forming. Under Title IX, these students deserve the support they need to achieve their educational goals. We must not leave them behind. For these reasons, NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland **urges a favorable committee report on bill SB0630**. Thank you for your time and consideration.

CHDC_LetterofSupport_AdultHighSchool2021.pdf

Uploaded by: Seidman, Ross

Position: FAV



Cherry Hill Development Corporation
806 Cherry Hill Road, Baltimore, Maryland 21225
Bus: (410) 355-1145 / Fax: (410) 355-1146

February 12, 2021

The Honorable Bill Ferguson
President of the Senate
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear President Ferguson,

The Cherry Hill Development Corporation enthusiastically supports SB 630 - the Adult Education High School Pilot Program. As a nonprofit organization serving the Cherry Hill community since 1981, we have lived and witnessed the effect of inadequate or insufficient education within low-income communities.

The Adult High School will help remove critical barriers to achieving greater self-sufficiency for low-income individuals in the State of Maryland by creating a pathway to sustained employment and further education. Also, the Adult High is an important component to the Purpose-Built Communities model, adopted by the Cherry Hill community which provides a high quality, neighborhood-serving continuum for student growth, learning, and achievement at every level starting at birth and through college and beyond.

As a community partner, the Cherry Hill Development Corporation will actively and proudly support The Adult High School Pilot program in South Baltimore. We encourage the Senate to do the same.

If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at 410-355-1145 or middletonmgm@gmail.com.

Sincerely,

Michael Middleton
Executive Director
Cherry Hill Development Corporation

SB7 LoS SB630_2021.pdf

Uploaded by: Seidman, Ross

Position: FAV



SOUTH BALTIMORE 7
UNITED COMMUNITIES

The Honorable Bill Ferguson
President of the Senate
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

February 12, 2021

Dear President Ferguson:

The South Baltimore 7 Coalition (SB7) writes in support of SB 630 – the Adult Education High School Pilot Program. SB7 is a partnership between six community organizations in South Baltimore whose goal is strengthening the South Baltimore communities by strategically tackling shared challenges. One of those challenges involves a lack of resources and accessibility to education, particularly for adults. Our mission follows:

*To inspire, enlighten, motivate, and empower our communities to maintain their greatness; to create a strong coalition to advocate and revitalize communities; To enhance quality of life through **improvement of education**, housing, public health, public safety and economic development.*

The benefits of this bill passage will reach far beyond its participants. Education is a right that has far too long been treated as a privilege that further perpetuates the class divide. With access to grants or and funding provided by the Program, participants will be given the opportunity to better themselves and, in turn, better the communities in which they live, work and serve. This fits directly with SB7's tenets of providing better access to education for our communities.

If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at (410) 355-1145 or mmiddleton@chdcmd.org.

Sincerely,

Michael Middleton

Michael Middleton
Chair, South Baltimore 7 Coalition

SB 630 Elev8 Baltimore.pdf

Uploaded by: Warrick Adams, Alexandria

Position: FAV

¹ <https://abell.org/publications/adult-high-school-diploma-achievement-baltimore>

SB630_FAV_JOTF.pdf

Uploaded by: York, Caryn

Position: FAV



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 0630:

Education - Adult High School Pilot Program - Funding and Grants

TO: Hon. Guy Guzzone, Chair, and Members of the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee

FROM: Christopher Dews, Policy Advocate

DATE: February 17, 2021

The Job Opportunities Task Force (JOTF) is an independent, nonprofit organization that develops and advocates policies and programs to increase the skills, job opportunities, and incomes of low-skill, low-wage workers and job seekers in Maryland. JOTF supports Senate Bill 630 as a means of ensuring that lower-income adult workers, job seekers, and formerly incarcerated persons have access to adult education services that will enable them to garner improved employment opportunities.

The Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce estimated that by 2020, 69 percent of the jobs in Maryland will require some training beyond high school—making a high school diploma a necessary, but not sufficient, credential for most employment opportunities throughout the state and region. Current data both pre and post-pandemic show that this analysis was correct. Even more so considering the amount of small business, restaurant, and retail jobs that have permanently closed were a high school diploma was not necessary. Yet, areas like Baltimore City, where 30-plus years of poorly performing public educational institutions, high dropout rates, and increased levels of juvenile incarceration have led to low levels of high school diploma attainment, are finding thousands of residents in a precarious position with respect to their employment.

In 2019, the Abell Foundation reported that an estimated 81,000 Baltimore City adults (age 18 and over) are lacking a high school diploma—the absence of which leaves them at a considerable disadvantage in the current economy and is correlated with a host of other poor outcomes for individuals, their families, and the broader community. The lack of a high school diploma both reflects and exacerbates some of the most severe inequities in our society. According to the U.S. Census American Community Survey, those with a high school diploma or its equivalent in Baltimore earn about \$7,000 more a year than those without one (an estimated \$28,396 versus \$21,359). The lack of a high school credential restricts opportunities for further education and training—that is, access to the sort of postsecondary career training required for competitiveness in pursuing the region’s middle-skill jobs. There is a correlation between not having a high school diploma and lower employment rates and higher rates of teen pregnancy and incarceration. The absence of a diploma exerts a cost on society in terms of lower tax revenue and higher costs of social services.

It is also of interest to note the correlation between a lack of a high school diploma and incarceration in Maryland. The average reading level of the 19,332 incarcerated citizens in the Maryland prison system is

JOTF JOB OPPORTUNITIES TASK FORCE

Advocating better skills, jobs, and incomes

between 5th and 8th grade. Less than half of this population has a high school diploma when they enter the correctional system. Current Maryland law attempts to address this issue by mandating that incarcerated persons enroll in educational or workforce skills classes for a minimum of 120 days if they lack a high school diploma, but the state fails to offer any incentive for actually completing these programs (i.e. diminution credits). In FY 2017, only 55 of the near 600 youth under the age of 21 attained their GED while enrolled in Correctional Education classes. This system is not effective for ensuring that returning citizens (especially youth) have a fighting chance in the job market upon their release. Studies have shown that recidivism rates for incarcerated persons with a high school diploma/GED or college degree are 7.9% less than the overall imprisoned population.

In September 2020, the Maryland Department of Labor made a tremendous effort to spread access to adult education for lower-income workers and job seekers by providing \$16.8 million in combined state and federal funding to 25 specific adult education providers. Grantees included all 16 Maryland community colleges, state correctional education, and others (the full list can be found [here](#)). Senate Bill 630 seeks to build on these efforts by establishing grant funding for *private* nonprofit organizations that provide adult education services. These appropriations will do wonders in reducing recidivism and increasing employment opportunities for both returning citizens and lower-income jobseekers. For these reasons, we urge a favorable report.