

**Written Testimony from American Federation of Teachers-Maryland
Submitted by Todd Reynolds, Ph.D., Political Coordinator
SB 647 - Federal COVID-19 Relief Funding – Report
Before the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
February 17, 2021**

SUPPORT

Good afternoon Chair Guzzone, Vice Chair Rosapepe, and members of the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee. AFT-Maryland is the state federation of numerous state, municipal, and public education labor unions throughout Maryland, representing thousands of public employees who have been providing vital services to Maryland residents in the middle of this pandemic. As such, we call for a favorable report to SB 647, the bill that would require a more thorough and detailed account of federal relief funds allotted to and spent by the state and its local subdivisions meant to help those entities maintain the services Maryland needs to weather the COVID-19 crisis.

No one can contest the fact that this pandemic has been both a public health and economic crisis. The nature of this disease—how easily it spreads throughout the community through contact with others, and how devastating it is to people’s short and long-term health—has, rightfully, caused us all to be more cautious about everyday activities. The slowdown of economic transactions has certainly hurt state and local government’s ability to generate the revenues needed to maintain basic services to its residents; under that context, the multiple relief packages passed over the past year by the Federal Government—including the \$2.2 trillion economic stimulus package under the CARES Act passed last March—have staved off complete economic collapse.

Despite this record aid provided by the federal government—including \$1.29 billion in CARES Act aid to the state and \$691 million to its largest counties—public employees at every level of government in this state have been constantly threatened with layoffs, furloughs, and salary reductions because management has said that these funds were not enough to cover revenue losses.

When asked to provide details of how these federal funds that were designed to help state and local governments prevent these catastrophic measures were being allocated, our unions have received only very basic, rudimentary summaries of those expenditures; not enough to conduct a thorough analysis of the efficacy and efficiency of the use of those taxpayer dollars, and certainly not enough to justify the layoff, furlough, or reduction in compensation for any public employee in the state.

Members of the committee, the level of aid provided to Maryland and its jurisdiction has been without precedent. This bill would require DBM to provide the details our public workers and residents must have in order to account for the incredible amount of dollars coming from Washington to our state.

There simply has not been another time when such aid has been needed or given to our state by the federal government, and as such, a greater level of transparency is required to assure our residents and employees that this money is being spent fairly and efficiently. We call for a favorable report of SB 647.