



## Maryland Alliance for Racial Equity in Education

### **Testimony for SB662: Education – Commission on Multicultural Education – Establishment** Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

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*by: Sharlimar Douglas, Chair of MAREE and Frank Patinella, Senior Education Advocate for the  
ACLU of Maryland*

### **POSITION: SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS**

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The Maryland Alliance for Racial Equity in Education (MAREE) is a coalition of education advocacy, civil rights, and community-based organizations that are committed to eliminating racial disparities in Maryland's education system. To that end, MAREE supports with amendments, SB662 - Education - Commission on Multicultural Education. SB662 would establish a commission to study and make recommendations on multicultural content and perspectives for consideration in the PK-12 curriculum. The bill will also provide training for teachers to deliver the content accurately and effectively. However, we are proposing an amendment to ensure that the members of this commission have extensive knowledge, experience and success in developing and delivering a multicultural education to Black and Brown children.

Maryland's schools are racially and ethnically diverse and it is long overdue for this diversity to be reflected in our school curriculum. Over recent decades, the demographics in Maryland schools have shifted significantly<sup>1,2</sup>. Overall, public school enrollment has increased by approximately 29% since 1990. Latino students made up 2.3% of Maryland's public school enrollment in 1990. Now they are 19.4% of the statewide enrollment and are the largest growing population in Maryland schools. The number of Asian students has doubled since 1990; now 6.6% of Maryland's school population. Black student enrollment has held relatively steady over this time period and make up 33.1% of the enrollment today, while the percentage of White students in Maryland schools is down nearly 50%, respectively.

At a time when our country is facing a reckoning on race, it is more important now than ever to be proactive about including and centering the history, contributions, and current day experiences of all Americans in our public school curriculum. Currently, this is not happening and over the years, members of MAREE who work with students and families have consistently heard complaints about the lack of multicultural content in their schools.

It is important to note that SB662 does not mandate curriculum. However, it would establish a process by which model coursework can be developed that will include historical and current events impacting various ethnic groups, including African Americans, Asian Americans, Latin Americans and Native and Indigenous populations. The process will allow legislators, school officials at the state and local levels, education advocates, content experts, and the public to engage in discussion before any decisions are made. Further, SB662 charges the commission with making recommendations on training framework for teachers on how to deliver a multicultural curriculum. Based on the experiences of the many groups in MAREE, this type of training is critical to ensure that educators have a deep understanding of the lived experiences of Black and Brown students and the appropriate pedagogical approach to teach them.

While we strongly support the passage of SB662, MAREE would like to offer an amendment related to the process by which commissioners are appointed. MAREE wants to ensure that content experts from the community, academia, and government entities are included among the membership of the commission. To ensure that a broad list of potential commissioners are identified and vetted, we ask that the bill be amended to give the certain legislative caucuses the sole authority to provide recommendations to the Governor, Senate President, and House Speaker for appointment. These caucuses should include the Black Caucus, Latino Caucus, Asian-American & Pacific-Islander Caucus, and the Women Legislators of Maryland. MAREE would also like add language to ensure that there are opportunities for all HBCUs in Maryland and experts from other educational institutions to be included in the development of the training and professional development programs for teachers on multicultural education.

We commend the legislature on its work to pass the ~\$4 billion Blueprint for Maryland's Future and we are excited about the new programs and resources that will be available to help students succeed. However, let's not overlook the opportunity to maximize student outcomes and allow inadequacies to persist in other areas of our education system. All children have a right to learn about history, culture, and civics from multiple cultural and racial perspectives. This will not only help affirm the lives of Black and Brown children; it will also help White children gain a deeper understanding of the complexity of our societal challenges and perspectives on how to be agents for unity and change in our world.

With the aforementioned amendments, MAREE urges the committee to give SB662 a favorable vote.

Thank you.

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1. *Trends in Maryland Public Schools: Enrollment, Maryland Equity Project, February 2015*

2. *Maryland Public School Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity and Gender and Number of Schools, Maryland Department of Education, September 2019*