



Senate Bill 965

Blueprint for Maryland's Future - Revisions

MACo Position:

LETTER OF INFORMATION

To: Education, Health, and Environmental

Affairs and Budget and Taxation Committees

Date: March 15, 2021

From: Michael Sanderson

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) hereby submits comments on SB 965. This bill implements multiple corrections and adjustments to the recently-enacted "Blueprint for Maryland's Future" legislation, HB 1300 of 2020. Overall, counties believe the bill makes appropriate adjustments to ensure a reasonable implementation of the multi-year school plan, and addresses technical matters arising from both its delay in implementation and the immediate effects of enrollment count variability.

Delaying FY 2022 Effects – The bill's approach to effectively delay both funding and programmatic effects is sensible. Because of the timing of the bill's enactment, these mainly technical changes ensure a sensible and coordinated launch of the bill's visions, with time to plan and budget for them at every level.

Remedying FY 2023 Enrollment Effects – The bill proposes a one-time adjustment to county funding requirements, recognizing the aberration arising from unusual September 2020 enrollment counts across many jurisdictions. This provision represents the needed third component (along with the "hold harmless" funding in the Governor's proposed budget, and a comparable county-level requirement in the proposed BRFA) to smoothly navigate these funding effects. With this section of SB 965 in place, county compliance with the FY 2022 "hold harmless" is very likely, which is an outcome sought by all stakeholders.

Highlighting Federal, Unspent Funds in School Budgets – School budgets are at their most opaque. The causes are fully understandable, with 2020-21's unique overlay of multiple rounds of federal support, mid-year shift of service delivery models, and an array of safety and precautionary spending amidst the pandemic. State policy direction on the reporting of fund uses, detailing of unspent balances, and the plans for future use of any such balances, is a matter of even greater interest than usual. Elaboration in SB 965, budget/BRFA language, or other efforts could prove most appropriate to promote this public insight.

Counties are central stakeholders and partners in the success of these educational goals, and by law are called upon to commit local resources toward their fulfillment. As the Committee works on SB 965, MACo and its county leadership are willing to contribute toward that effort, and any parallel General Assembly deliberations.