

KATIE FRY HESTER
Legislative District 9
Carroll and Howard Counties

Education, Health, and
Environmental Affairs Committee

Chair, Joint Committee on
Cybersecurity, Information Technology
and Biotechnology



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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Sponsor Testimony for SB4: Cybersecurity Scholarship Program - Alterations and Maryland Cybersecurity Loan Assistance Repayment Program - Establishment

February 9th, 2022

Chair Pinsky, Vice Chair Kagan, Members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee:

Thank you for your consideration of Senate Bill 4, which would expand the current Cybersecurity Public Service Scholarship and establish the Cybersecurity Loan Assistance Repayment Program.

Over the past two years, our everyday lives have transitioned online at a faster rate than ever before, enabling us to advance our economy and culture in ways that weren't imaginable just a few decades ago. However, these advancements have also introduced new and ever-evolving threats to our critical infrastructure and personal information. Most recently, this threat has been highlighted by the MDH hack which left Marylanders without COVID-19 data during the omicron surge, unable to access their prescriptions for illnesses such as HIV, and prevented our health care professionals from completing core functions of their jobs. However, this is not the first time that a state or local agency faced a cyberattack: Baltimore City, Baltimore County, Salisbury, and Leonardtown, have also been attacked within the last decade.

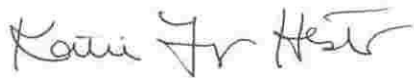
Our systems are vulnerable, and the ability to recruit and retain qualified staff is consistently cited as a challenge for state or local agencies. In light of this challenge, I have been working with the administration and am delighted to see additional funding for the existing Cybersecurity Public Service Scholarship Program in the FY23 budget. While this is a good start, the state must still do more to cultivate and maintain a robust talent pipeline.

The existing Public Service Scholarship program is overly restrictive: students may only receive the scholarship for two years, must attend college full-time, and may only work for the state. These criteria do not reflect current trends in education. SB4 would address these concerns by expanding the scholarship to include part-time students, allowing students to receive the award for three years instead of two, and by adding community colleges, county governments, and municipal governments to the list of eligible public service requirement employers.

It would also establish a Loan Assistance Repayment Program, based on Maryland's own Janet L. Hoffman program. This would make it possible for a student graduating this year, who wasn't able to benefit from the scholarship, to have their loans fully or partially repaid by the state if they take a public sector IT or cybersecurity job. This additional benefit would dramatically increase the competitiveness of state and local jobs at a time when public salaries are much lower than private ones.

Both of these programs are aimed at retaining current cybersecurity professionals and developing our future workforce such that our public entities have a top-tier talent pool to draw from. In my view, these programs are essential to protect our critical infrastructure and Marylanders' data. For these reasons, **I respectfully request a favorable committee report on SB4.**

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Katie Fry Hester".

Senator Katie Fry Hester
Howard and Carroll Counties