



**Testimony for the House Ways and Means Committee  
February 24, 2022**

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**House Bill 678 — Education - Fine Arts - Curriculum Requirement,  
Study, and Report (Arts Equity in Education Act)**

**FAVORABLE**

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The ACLU of Maryland's *Right to Education* works to ensure that all public school students can learn, thrive, and effectively engage in the social, political, and economic life of their community. Given the significant gaps in the availability of Fine Arts programming in PreK-12 public schools throughout Maryland, we strongly support the passage of HB 678 - Education - Fine Arts - Curriculum Requirement, Study, and Report (Arts Equity in Education Act). HB678 seeks to ensure better offerings and access to fine arts programming throughout Maryland, especially for districts of low wealth that have large populations of Black and Brown children. The bill adds \$25 million to the state's existing Fine Arts Grant program, managed by the Maryland State Department of Education.

A large body of research shows that high quality fine arts programs in public schools has significant benefits for academic outcomes and for the social and emotional development of children and adolescents<sup>1</sup>. Students that have access to fine arts programs scored 13% better on writing scores and show a measurable reduction in disciplinary infractions. Students with access to arts education also show more tolerance and compassion for others, which improves overall school climate and contributes to a more civil society<sup>2</sup>.

The Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR) defines Fine Arts as a core subject and requires that schools include arts education in five disciplines — dance, media arts, music, theater, and visual arts. In Baltimore City, 90% of students

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<sup>1</sup> Kisida, Brian and Bowen, Daniel H. New evidence of the benefits of arts education, Brookings Institution, February 12, 2019. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2019/02/12/new-evidence-of-the-benefits-of-arts-education/>

<sup>2</sup> Leroux, Kelly and Bernadka, Anna. Impact of the Arts on Individual Contributions to US Civil Society, *Journal of Civil Society*, Vol 10, 2014, May 15, 2014. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/17448689.2014.912479>

have access to visual art and 65% have access to general music<sup>3</sup>. Less than 10% of city students have access to instrumental music, theater, and dance. There are certainly gaps in arts education throughout the state, however, data on arts education for all 24 Maryland school districts is not readily accessible. The ACLU is asking for an amendment to make publicly available the COMAR reports, which are already required by MSDE, on Fine Arts offerings for every Maryland school district. To ensure that HB678 is equitably distributed, it is essential that lawmakers as well as the public, can access this information and that MSDE uses this data to inform their decisions on appropriating the state's Fine Arts Grants.

The Blueprint for Maryland's Future is going to bring many new programs but let's not forget about comprehensive high-quality arts education and the positive impact that it can have on tens of thousands of students in our state.

For these reasons, we ask the committee to give HB 678 a favorable report.

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<sup>3</sup> The Baltimore Arts Education Initiative, Arts Everyday, Data for 2020-2011.  
<https://www.artseveryday.org/our-work/arts-advocacy/baei/>

