



House Bill 541 - FAVORABLE

Maryland General Assembly
House Ways and Means Committee

February 17, 2022

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Chairman Atterbeary, Vice Chair Washington, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Joe Horvath, and I am a visiting fellow at Opportunity Solutions Project (OSP). OSP is a non-profit, non-partisan advocacy organization dedicated to advancing policies that reduce barriers to work and help people into the jobs they want and need.

Thank you for hearing this legislation before your committee, and for allowing me to submit this testimony in support of House Bill 541.

The importance of House Bill 541 for Maryland can be summed up in a few numbers: 43,000, 198,000, and 4.

First, \$43,000 represents the average Marylander's student debt, the second highest in the nation, trailing only Washington, D.C.¹ Second, 198,000 represents the estimated total unfilled jobs in Maryland.² And four represents the few years each young Marylander has in high school to figure it all out.

Thankfully, House Bill 541 provides a solution: The bill makes sure that skilled trade organizations and career education organizations have a seat at the table with the Career and Technical Education Committee and are able to provide their valuable input in helping young people learn about pathways to success, work, and opportunities so they can secure well-paying jobs in the modern economy.

House Bill 541 is elegant in its simplicity, but that does not mean it is not high-impact legislation. Unfortunately, too many young people enter and then leave high school without a plan or a strong sense of direction for their future. I, myself was one of them. Anything that can be done to make those years as effective as possible is a good thing for young people.

With nearly 200,000 open jobs estimated in Maryland, who better to help direct young people to a path to filling those jobs than skilled trades and career schools themselves? These groups have a wealth of knowledge and experience to share with policymakers, parents, students, and educators. Allowing them to be involved just makes sense.

As for student debt loads, it must be said: There will always be a place for the four-year liberal arts education in America. That is not going away any time soon, nor should it. In fact, for many young Marylanders, four-year college is the right choice. However, the most common path to success in America is still found through a job, and it is crucial that resources like those created by House Bill 541 exist for young people looking to join the trades, get a job, and support themselves right away.

For all these reasons, I urge you to support House Bill 541.

¹ Melanie Hanson, "Student Loan Debt. By State," Education Data Initiative, Aug. 2021, <https://educationdata.org/student-loan-debt-by-state>.

² Samuel Stebbins, "How the Number of Job Openings in Maryland Compares to the Rest of the US," Southern Maryland Chronicle, February 14, 2022, <https://southernmarylandchronicle.com/2022/02/14/how-the-number-of-job-openings-in-maryland-compares-to-the-rest-of-the-us/>.