

To the House Ways and Means Education Subcommittee:

I urge you to support HB 0678 TITLE: Education - Fine Arts - Curriculum Requirement, Study, and Report (Arts Equity in Education Act)

Abundant studies demonstrate that children who participate in strong arts programs (dance, media arts, music, theatre, and visual arts) achieve at higher levels academically and are more likely to go to college. And, significant in this time of crisis, neuroscience shows that the arts are associated with mental and behavioral health and a sense of well-being for children and adults alike.

Most crucially, arts programs build capacities for creativity, collaboration, communication, and critical thinking, which are all highly valued by employers and enhance personal growth. Finally, the arts afford cultural literacy: the opportunity to deeply understand oneself and others. This is more essential now than at any other time in our history.

Arts educators in our state, with the support of the broader arts community and our excellent institutions of higher education have made Maryland a leader in high quality arts education programs. Maryland includes the arts as core subject areas. Our fine arts standards are clearly defined in regulation and are excellent. That body of regulations, COMAR, is the historic and ongoing foundation for equity in Maryland education and is aligned with Federal law under the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) which requires a well-rounded education for all students.

Unfortunately, the arts are an area in which there is great variability among school programs; the breadth and depth of arts programs vary greatly across Maryland. It is axiomatic that arts programs are the first to be eliminated in the face of inadequate funding in schools.

We have clear documentation of the inequity among schools within and across school systems. Lack of access to arts programs tracks with poverty and is associated with schools with a majority of children of color.

The members of the Maryland General Assembly have an historic opportunity to right this wrong. Delegate Michele Guyton has introduced HB 678 Arts Equity in Education Act now under consideration by the House Ways and Means Committee.

The Arts Equity in Education Act (AEEA) dedicates \$25 million to supplement school district efforts in meeting COMAR's requirements and closing documented equity gaps. Funding uses include: arts teachers, materials, equipment, and professional development. Existing regulation requires the Maryland State Department of Education to monitor the compliance of schools in providing arts education programs per COMAR. The AEEA legislation will ensure ongoing oversight by the legislature to ensure that the arts are no longer an unfunded mandate.

I urge the legislature to pass HB678 to deliver equity in arts education that will make it possible for all students to achieve, create, and be fully contributing members of our communities through the qualities and capacities that are fostered uniquely by the arts.

Thank you.

Mary Ann E. Mears, Founder of Arts Education in Maryland Schools (AEMS), Co-Chair of the Governor's Task Force on Arts Education in Maryland Schools with Dr. Jack Smith, and past Trustee of MCA and other arts boards. Sculptor of Public Art.