



PSSAM
Public School Superintendents' Association
OF MARYLAND

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BILL: HB 569

TITLE: Primary and Secondary Education - Education Savings Account Program - Established (Maryland Universal School Choice Act)

DATE: March 7, 2023

POSITION: Oppose

COMMITTEE: House Appropriations Committee

CONTACT: Mary Pat Fannon, Executive Director, PSSAM

The Public School Superintendents' Association of Maryland (PSSAM), on behalf of all twenty-four public school superintendents, **opposes** House Bill 569.

House Bill 569 seeks to establish an Education Savings Account (ESA) program in the State, which would provide grants to families to defray specified costs related to nonpublic or homeschooling for eligible students. This bill requires the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) to administer the program. Additionally, this bill allows a subtraction modification under the Maryland income tax for deposits into an education savings account under the Education Savings Account program.

PSSAM opposes public financing for private schools in every shape and size, including education savings accounts and the use of public financing tools for families choosing non-public schools. Under the proposed ESA program, the State would be required to provide taxpayer funds directly to private schools. While seemingly not a voucher program, this program uses public dollars to fund private schools and divert scarce resources away from the public education system that serves 90% of American children.

Additionally, PSSAM opposes the proposal to establish a new Education Savings Account program on the basis that it would provide grants to parents for home instruction expenses. Maryland's long-standing approach to homeschooling establishes very limited educational, reporting, and verification requirements for parents choosing to homeschool their child. In fact, current regulations simply require parents to sign a form verifying that they will provide "regular, thorough instruction during the school year in the studies usually taught in the public

schools to children of the same age,” consent to requirements to keep a portfolio of the student’s work, and submit to semester evaluations by school system staff. This is the full extent of any governmental role in the education of home schooled children, largely due to the advocacy of parents, who have successfully maintained State regulations that prohibit school systems from imposing any additional requirements for home instruction programs.

Local superintendents do not seek additional oversight in Maryland’s homeschooling regulations. At the same time, PSSAM does not support increasing the burden on state revenues and future state budgets by establishing an income tax credit to benefit parents who exercise their choice to provide their children with home instruction, with no legal means to ensure accountability of instruction. Unlike public schools, homeschooling parents have no means of direct accountability to taxpayers for their use of tax revenues. Funds provided to parents through ESA programs in other states have been found ripe for fraud and abuse -- In 2018, the state’s Auditor General in Arizona found that parents misused over \$700,000 in ESA funds on items such as beauty supplies and sports apparel, with no way for the state to recoup the money.

The diversion of public education funds to nonpublic schools and homeschooling programs is likely to have serious economic, legal, and public policy consequences. If public education funds were to be used for the support of nonpublic schools and homeschooling students, fewer resources would be available for public elementary and secondary schools. This diversion of public education funding would impede the ability of localities to ensure an appropriate, safe, and equitable education for all students -- an high standard of accountability held to us by taxpayers who directly fund public education programs.

For these reasons, PSSAM **opposes** House Bill 569 and requests an unfavorable committee report.