



House Bill 546

Education - Service Year Option Program - Establishment
(Serving Every Region Through Vocational Exploration Act of 2023)

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Appropriations Committee

WITH AMENDMENTS

Date: February 21, 2023

From: Brianna January

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** HB 546 **WITH AMENDMENTS**. This bill would establish a new State Department of Service and Civic Innovation and a Service Year Option Program Fund to support the Department and its operations. An amendment to target the public sector workforce could help strengthen the bill's effect.

Public sector employment is in crisis across the board – for the State and local governments alike – and counties commend HB 546's innovative policy solution to address the complex and challenging issues of workforce development and public service. One of the goals of the program is strengthening the pipeline of talent into the State and local governments – a goal that counties welcome and are also working toward, individually and collectively.

Under that goal, HB 546 specifies that the Service Year Option will focus service year placements in the noble areas of climate, education, and health. Counties strongly agree that these areas desperately deserve additional support and attention. In fact, counties are supporting a number of legislative initiatives this session, focused on these professional areas. Furthermore, one of MACo's 2023 initiatives is to address these issues specifically facing volunteer and professional firefighting.

As prime employers and major frontline-service providers across Maryland, counties remain ready to continue addressing public workforce needs, including through the mechanism envisioned in HB 546.

Counties do believe, however, that the bill – and Marylanders – would best be served with a friendly amendment to add to the short list of priority service placements: “POSITIONS IN STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT FACING PERSISTENT RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION CHALLENGES.” These should include, but not be limited to: first responders, public and environmental health professionals, and public works and trade-skilled positions.

Counties look forward to working with the legislature and Administration on HB 546 and similar measures to strengthen Maryland's public workforce. For these reasons, MACo urges a **FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS** report.