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March 3, 2023

Testimony Concerning H.N. 1098, the Education – English Learners and Dual Language Immersion Programs – Funding and Establishment (Multilingualism Is an Asset Act)

I respectfully submit to the Committee this testimony in **support of House Bill 1098** – English Learners and Dual Language Immersion Programs – Funding and Establishment (Multilingualism Is an Asset Act). The Blueprint for Maryland’s Future is a powerful statement of priority on the part of the Maryland General Assembly, and it signals the state’s concern for and commitment to the education of English Learners. The changes proposed in this bill, building upon the recommendations of the Blueprint Workgroup on English Learners in Public Schools, would make good on the Blueprint’s promise to revisit this issue with the benefit of further research and to strengthen the state’s investment in English Learners.

I was privileged to be able to present to the Workgroup on English Learners [at its tenth meeting](#) in April 2022. My presentation focused on equitable funding policies and how to structure Maryland’s funding policies to better support the education of the state’s many and diverse English learners. I am delighted to see the most important aspects of that discussion represented in this bill. In brief, the bill would make English learner funding in Maryland more adequate, better align funding levels with the needs of students and school districts, address diseconomies of scale in English learner instruction, and make Maryland the first state in the nation provide specific, systematic funding for the needs of students with limited and interrupted formal education.

Specifically, I would like to note and applaud the following elements:

- H.B. 1098 would increase the English learner per pupil amount to 100% in fiscal year 2033 and thereafter. This would offer an important corrective to a fairness and adequacy problem in the existing funding law. Currently, the English learner per pupil amount is scheduled to steadily decline as a proportion of the target per pupil foundation amount between 2026 and 2033. As a result, while the per pupil foundation amount (that is, funding for students without identified needs) is scheduled to increase by 67% between FY2022 and FY2033, the total funding per English learner is now scheduled to increase by only 55%. The change proposed in this bill would make that 67%, properly allowing English learners to benefit from the state’s increasing investment on par with their native-English-speaking peers
- H.B. 1098 would make the important change of differentiating the supplemental funding amount for different categories of English learners. While the English learner per pupil amount compares favorably with similar allocations in most states (and would be a true national leader if this bill’s increase were made), Maryland currently falls short of national best practices when it comes to aligning these supplemental funds to the specific needs of different EL students. This

bill would adjust the English learner per-pupil amount for students of varying proficiency levels, appropriately recognizing the distinct resource needs of newcomer students and students with different degrees of English ability. This practice is well-precedented ([structurally similar policies](#) exist in Hawaii, Indiana, Michigan, North Dakota, and Ohio) and would better support English learners on their paths to English language proficiency and fluent multilingualism.

- H.B. 1098 would take the incredibly important step of providing increased formula funding for students with limited and interrupted formal education (SLIFE). SLIFE face unique educational challenges and they need and deserve specific and tailored supports. It is a national shame that no state currently provides systematic funding for this population. If this change is made, Maryland would lead the country on this issue, and its schools would be uniquely positioned to help SLIFE achieve their academic goals.
- H.B. 1098 would make two important changes to address diseconomy-of-scale challenges that schools and districts sometimes face when serving English learners. First, in a student-based funding system, it can be difficult to sustain English learner instruction in schools with small numbers of English learners. The bill would adjust the English learner count in such schools to ensure financial sustainability. Second, it can be more resource-intensive to serve a linguistically diverse group of English learners, because individual native-language populations may be small. To meet this challenge, H.B. 1098 introduces the concept of the “Native Language Ratio” and provides increased supplemental funding allocations for English learners in more linguistically diverse schools. Both of these changes would be valuable, and the second would break important new state policy ground and position Maryland as a national leader on this issue.
- H.B. 1098 specifies that students eligible for multiple supplemental allocations will be funded with the full sum of all those supplemental allocations. This is absolutely the most equitable approach and is aligned with the reality that each of these funding categories is meant to respond to a distinct challenge or circumstance. A student experiencing more than one of these circumstances will have a compound need that should be met with compound funding. There are other states whose policies do not meet this bar (including California, Louisiana, Nevada, and New Jersey), and it is important that Maryland affirms that it will not shortchange students in this way.

This strong legislation could be even further improved with the addition of another differentiated category of English learner students. Long-term English learners (those who have been enrolled in a U.S. school for more than six years without being reclassified as English proficient) have higher needs and require additional resources to support their language development. In this way, they are much like other subgroups of English learners, like newcomer or SLIFE students. They should be similarly recognized with an increased English learner per-pupil amount in the Maryland funding system. I respectfully submit that an insertion to this effect would improve the bill.

Overall, the funding formula changes proposed in H.B. 1098 would represent significant steps forward for Maryland’s support of English learner education. I therefore urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 1098 from the Committee. I can be reached at 202-596-3401 or stadler@newamerica.org for any questions or additional information.