



Board of Education of Howard County
Testimony Submitted to the Maryland Senate,
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
March 7, 2023

Board of Education
of Howard County

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SB0913: FAVORABLE

Publicly Funded Full-Day Prekindergarten Program - Tier I Child - Alteration of Definition

The Board of Education of Howard County (the Board) supports **Publicly Funded Full-Day Prekindergarten Program - Tier I Child - Alteration of Definition** to provide adequate early childhood education funding to local school systems.

SB0913 was introduced following discussions among local school systems, the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) and the Accountability and Implementation Board to meet the intent of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future to expand universal access to prekindergarten for the state's most vulnerable populations. As passed under the Blueprint legislation, the definition of Tier I child under Education Article §7-1A-01 reads:

- (i) "Tier I child" means a child:
 - (1) Who is 3 or 4 years old;
 - (2) Whose family income is less than or equal to 300% of the federal poverty level; and
 - (3) Whose family chooses to enroll the child in full-day prekindergarten.

Under Education Article §7-1A-06 language reflecting the anticipated intent of expansion of prekindergarten reads:

- (d) Priority in expanding prekindergarten slots shall be provided to 3- and 4-year olds who are:
 - (1) Tier I children;
 - (2) Children with disabilities, regardless of income;
 - (3) Homeless youth; and
 - (4) Children from homes in which English is not the primary spoken language.

However, because the additional populations under §7-1A-06 are not part of the "Tier I child" definition under §7-1A-01, they are not currently included in funding calculations by the State for prekindergarten enrollment. This is compounded by the fact that the number of eligible prekindergarten students counted in the funding formula dropped significantly in FY2024 compared to FY2023 (421 compared to 1,320) due to a proxy used by MSDE to determine eligibility in FY2023 that included all enrolled students regardless of income, full-day vs. half-day, or disability, homeless, or English learner status.

For the 421 prekindergarten students eligible under the current §7-1A-01 definition in FY2024, Howard County's state share is \$1,848,016. The HCPSS Office of Early Intervention Services, which oversees programs for prekindergarten students with disabilities, indicates 134 four-year-old students, regardless of family income, were enrolled as of September 30, 2022, in full-day slots, which equates to approximately \$588,204 in the state share of prekindergarten funding, a 32% increase in available state funding if SB0913 were to pass. Additional information gathering would be needed to determine the funding impact of adding children who are homeless youths, and children who are from homes in which English is not the primary spoken language.

To be clear, these are not anticipated slots or an estimation of future needs – these students are being served by HCPSS this school year, with expansion expected across all prekindergarten programs as Blueprint is further implemented. SB0913 is needed to adequately fund the services being provided in Howard County and across the state for our youngest learners.

For these reasons, we urge a FAVORABLE report of SB0913 from this Committee.