

On behalf of Allegany College of Maryland, I am pleased to offer our complete support of SB0822, “Pathways in Technology Early College High (P-TECH) School Program – High School Diplomas”.

Beginning in the 2017-2018 school year, Allegany College of Maryland in cooperation with the Allegany County Public Schools (ACPS), began to offering incoming ninth grade students the opportunity to participate in an early college program through the Allegany County Pathways in Technology Early College High (P-TECH) Program. This opportunity was made possible through collaboration between ACPS, Allegany College of Maryland, and several industry partners, including UPMC- Western Maryland.

As you are aware, the P-TECH program is a high school and beyond (9-14) model, which combines high school, college, and the world of work. The program’s mission is to provide students with a free education that starts in grade nine, continues through high school completion with a high school diploma, and culminates in the attainment of an Associate Degree.

Participating students will gain workplace skills and have access to mentoring and other career experiences. The ultimate goal of the P-TECH program of study in Allegany County is for students to earn an Associate of Applied Science Degree in Computer Technology with a Cybersecurity option within two years of graduating from ACPS.

This unique opportunity has also brought to light some unique obstacles that we have experienced and this request will help to remove these barriers and provide students every opportunity to be successful.

Specifically, our P-TECH students, upon starting year five in the program and becoming full-time college students, are not awarded their high school diploma, although they have completed all the requirements for high school graduation during year 4 of the program. These P-TECH students are not considered to have completed the P-TECH program until they have earned the college-level Associate’s degree, at which time they are then awarded their high school diploma. For students who choose the 5-year or 6-year P-TECH Pathway, the high school diploma is kept “on file” with the public school system, per requirement of the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), until the Associate’s degree has been earned. When students meet the P-TECH program requirements by earning the Associate’s degree and the high school diploma, they are awarded both.

These current guidelines can negatively impact student participants in the following ways:

Federal Financial Aid: Participants are ineligible for federal aid- specifically Pell Grants because they do not have a high school diploma. A transcript or letter stating they have met the requirements to graduate is not acceptable. Students who take extra courses beyond the P-TECH pathway are not provided funding which negatively impacts their educational growth and development.

College Athletics: Students must meet a minimum number of credit hours to participate. Students are unable to receive federal aid to take classes beyond their P-TECH pathway.

Driver’s License: We have found that many high school students do not obtain their learners permit until they turn 18. Without a diploma, they have to wait 9 months to obtain the Provisional License and extended probationary period causes transportation issues once they are out of high school and transporting themselves to campus.

This legislative change would allow P-TECH participants to receive their high school diploma following completion of all high school graduation requirements. Without this change, we anticipate additional road blocks for P-TECH students who do not have access to their diploma as the program continues to grow and expand in our county and across the State.

As provided in advance, letters of support from several participating public school systems and community colleges as well as the Allegany County Chamber of Commerce further document this support. Thank you for the opportunity to advocate for this legislative revision to remove this barrier and provide students every opportunity to be successful.

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