



House Bill 1115

*County Boards of Education – Budgets – Notice
(Transparency in Education Spending Act)*

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Appropriations Committee

Date: March 7, 2024

From: Brianna January

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** HB 1115. This bill ensures that county governments receive more comprehensive and timely data about school system spending as funding partners for Maryland public schools. **Counties value transparency and good governance in education funding, so much so that HB 1115 is one of MACo’s four 2024 legislative priorities. The bill, as introduced, represents more than a year’s work and collaboration with multiple education stakeholders and legislative leaders.**

All education stakeholders benefit from a clear understanding of the sources and uses of public school funding. Recently, the opacity of pandemic-driven federal funds and revelations about separately maintained fund balances have heightened these concerns from county governments and other stakeholders. The school board budget proposal and routine reporting should grant the county funding entities enough clarity and structure to fairly assess those priorities on behalf of their communities. Maryland law should ensure that decision-makers and stakeholders can connect public funds to the needed investments for educational outcomes. HB 1115 seeks to do just that by making uniform reporting requirements, including on school system reserves and their proposed uses, and by empowering the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) to share spending information more fully and efficiently with county governments.

Additionally, HB 1115 requires school systems to post certain budget data online in an easy-to-find manner. This will ensure that Marylanders have access to the same information as the State and county governments about how local school systems invest taxpayer dollars.

Importantly, HB 1115 does not alter the process for appropriating school funding, nor any funding requirements. It is simply a good governance and best practice bill to increase transparency in the State’s and counties’ most important investment and largest investment of Maryland tax dollars – education.

K-12 spending makes up the greatest portion of nearly all county budgets; for many, education funding is greater than all other county spending combined, including public safety and transportation. Counties must have access to the most comprehensive and timely spending data available to responsibly budget and prepare for the immediate and long-term expenses associated with the Blueprint for Maryland’s Future. The Blueprint’s success, and the public’s support of that plan, depend on it. For these reasons, MACo **SUPPORTS HB 1115** and urges a **FAVORABLE** report.