



HOWARD COUNTY OFFICE OF COUNTY EXECUTIVE

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March 7, 2024

Delegate Ben Barnes, Chair
House Appropriations Committee
House Office Building, Room 121
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: **TESTIMONY OF SUPPORT:** HB 1115- County Boards of Education – Budget – Notice (Transparency in Education Spending Act)

Dear Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Chang, and Members of the Appropriations Committee,

I am pleased to write in support of House Bill 1115, which would require our State Board of Education to develop and adopt a process for the uniform and timely reporting and public display of local board of education budget data.

As Howard County Executive and a former educator, I am fully committed to implementing the Blueprint for Maryland's Future to enhance the excellence of our Howard County Public School System (HCPSS). During the past five years, we have provided nearly \$130 million above the state required Maintenance of Effort (MOE), even with annual decreased student enrollment since 2020.

Our record investments in education show our ongoing dedication to our students, educators, and community. While doing so, we must establish responsible and transparent fiscal policies so that we can responsibly balance the current needs of our community and plan for the future of Howard County. Our five years of historic levels of investment come in addition to the aid provided by our partners at the Federal level.

Since Fiscal Year 2021, the Federal Government has provided more than \$120 million to HCPSS through the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Aid Relief (ESSER). This *one-time* funding was targeted to sustain the safe operation of schools and students greatly impacted by learning loss from the COVID-19 pandemic. Like many local governments across the state, Howard County has very little awareness of how those funds were allocated, including exactly how much may have been used to cover reoccurring costs.

Statewide, more than \$3.2 billion in ESSER funding was received and dispersed to local school systems. The corresponding ESSR transparency page published by the State Department of Education has not updated grant totals or spending since June of 2022.

With these substantial levels of investment, local governments and our entire community deserve clarity and collaboration between funding partners and local school boards.



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Significant supplemental funding makes it even more necessary to understand the full financial needs of school districts, especially as we work towards implementing the intended pillars of the Blueprint.

The State Aid formula for local systems is received by Boards of Education as unrestricted funding. Local governments have no authority or decision-making over school budgets, and this bill will not amend that authority, nor does it mandate new or extensive reporting than already required by law.

House Bill 1115 would simply provide local governments and our community access to more complete and timely education spending information using existing reporting requirements and systems. It will better equip local governments with the tools to budget responsibly, anticipate education costs, and set financial reporting standards and expectations for all school systems and local governments statewide.

I welcome your support and respectfully request a favorable report on House Bill 1115.

All the Best,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Calvin Ball', is written over a horizontal line.

Calvin Ball
Howard County Executive