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## THE SENATE OF MARYLAND ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

### TESTIMONY OF SENATOR SHELLY HETTLEMAN SB 370 COMMUNITY SCHOOLS – RENTAL ASSISTANCE FOR COMMUNITY SCHOOL FAMILIES PROGRAM AND FUND – ESTABLISH

The relationship between housing, education, and positive life outcomes is undeniable. Both housing and education have long been acknowledged as two significant social determinants of health, especially among youth and young people. SB370 seeks to establish a program meant to recognize and bolster the connection between these two facets of students' lives.

Schools play a significant role in the lives of youth as students typically spend a third or more of their days engaged in school-related activities. This time is generally only surpassed by the time individuals spend at home. However, for an alarming number of students, housing insecurity threatens this balance.

From January to October 2023, 18,399 families were evicted in Maryland. This is like 2019 numbers during the same period and more than a 75% increase from 2022.<sup>1</sup> Families with children make up more than 90% of households very likely to be evicted due to outstanding rent debts.<sup>2</sup> Many of these households are low-income and minority. Adverse effects due to childhood homelessness and housing insecurity have previously been noted regarding students' test scores, academic achievement, and attendance, among other outcomes.<sup>3</sup>

Community schools were established with a particular focus on addressing students holistically and acknowledging the important role that additional resources can play in ensuring success in the classroom and in life. Community schools are those which receive Concentration of Poverty Grants—funds dispersed in consideration of the percentage of students who live in poverty.<sup>4</sup> This is impactful as a significant proportion of student live in poverty statewide.<sup>5</sup> The General Assembly passed several pieces of substantial legislation in recent years to establish the Blueprint for Maryland's Future. Via the Blueprint, the state is on track to convert almost one-third of Maryland public schools into community schools by 2027.<sup>6</sup>

One of the main pillars of the Blueprint is to provide more resources for students to be successful, including via coordinating community support, investing into more in-school

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<sup>1</sup> *MEPFA Policy Analysis*

<sup>2</sup> Maryland Emergency Rental Assistance Coalition, *Fact Sheet for 2023 Legislative Session*, NLIHC (2023), [https://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/2022-03/2022AG\\_3-01\\_NHTF.pdf](https://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/2022-03/2022AG_3-01_NHTF.pdf) (last visited Jan 25, 2024).

<sup>3</sup> See e.g., Rajeev Darolia & Andrew Sullivan, *The dynamics and measurement of high school homelessness and achievement*, 52 *Educational Researcher* 413–421 (2023).

<sup>4</sup> *Office of Community Schools and Expanded Learning Time*, Maryland State Department of Education, <https://www.marylandpublicschools.org/about/Pages/DSFSS/Community-Schools/Index.aspx> (last visited Jan 24, 2024).

<sup>5</sup> Community Schools - Maryland State Education Association, Maryland State Education Association - 76,000 Members Strong (2021), <https://marylandeducators.org/community-schools/> (last visited Jan 24, 2024).

<sup>6</sup> Community Schools - Maryland State Education Association, Maryland State Education Association - 76,000 Members Strong (2021), <https://marylandeducators.org/community-schools/> (last visited Jan 24, 2024).

assistance, and facilitating wraparound services.<sup>7</sup> SB370 seeks to establish a program to facilitate such services as they relate to housing.

A 2021 study found strong evidence that rental assistance leads to reduction in school absences due to illness, especially among adolescents.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, according to the Maryland Eviction Prevention Fund Alliance (MEPFA), every \$1 spent on eviction prevention in Maryland saves the state \$2.39.<sup>9</sup> The State has already invested significantly into policies under the Blueprint, with billions expected to be invested from the State and local governments combined over the next decade.<sup>10</sup>

Funds appropriated via SB370 would assist students and their families to avoid eviction and housing insecurity, ensuring that students' academic lives and overall wellbeing are not adversely affected by conditions which unfortunately impact many Maryland residents.

Through implementing a novel program, SB370 proposes to act as a safety net which maintains some of the housing assistance relief felt by many residents under COVID era policies. The Moore Administration's upcoming housing agenda, while comprehensive and wide-reaching, will require time to be fully implemented. SB370 seeks to ensure that in the interim, students and their families are able to remain in their homes and in their community schools.

I urge a favorable report on SB 370. Thank you

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<sup>7</sup> The 5 pillars, Accountability and Implementation Board (AIB), <https://aib.maryland.gov/Pages/5-Pillars.aspx> (last visited Jan 24, 2024).

<sup>8</sup> Andrew Fenelon et al., *The benefits of rental assistance for Children's Health and school attendance in the United States*, 58 *Demography* 1171–1195 (2021).

<sup>9</sup> *MEPFA Policy Analysis: Maryland's Need for Eviction Prevention Funds (EPF) and the Estimated Fiscal Impact of EPF*, mdeconomy (2023), [https://www.mdeconomy.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/MEPFA-EPF-Policy-Analysis\\_v3.pdf](https://www.mdeconomy.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/MEPFA-EPF-Policy-Analysis_v3.pdf) (last visited Jan 21, 2024).

<sup>10</sup> About blueprint, Accountability and Implementation Board (AIB), <https://aib.maryland.gov/Pages/about-blueprint.aspx#> (last visited Jan 24, 2024).