

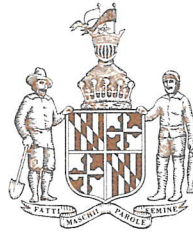
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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Senate Bill 883 – Education – Virtual Tutoring Services – Applicant Review

March 6, 2024

Mister Chairman and Members of the Education, Energy and the Environment Committee:

One of the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and shut down has been widespread learning loss. Reports show that math and reading proficiencies have had significant declines during COVID and exacerbated pre-existing educational inequities, leading to diverse learning gaps across counties.

To address this learning loss, many local school districts have recognized the value of incorporating virtual tutoring services. They have released RFPs and contracted with companies to provide tutoring for targeted student populations, including those experiencing homelessness and those attending Community Schools, who could benefit most from such help.

Unfortunately, the current process to onboard tutors can take months due to regulations around fingerprinting requirements, (which vary for each local school district). The tutors are required to be fingerprinted in person in the district, which is often restricted to one location, or to go through a lengthy process of requesting a fingerprint form, getting the form in the mail, submitting the form via mail, and then waiting for the Central Repository to conduct the background check. This has in many cases made it too difficult for the virtual tutoring services, who have tutors across the country, from being able to implement at scale, keeping the state from meeting its goal of providing access to high-quality, high-impact tutoring.

Senate Bill 883, as amended, is being introduced to ensure Maryland has access to enough tutors, while continuing to ensure the safety of our children. The bill meets this challenge by clarifying that virtual tutoring services must provide screening for contractors who do not provide services on school grounds.

In addition:

- Providers of virtual tutoring services must be background checked in exactly the same way as any other individual who works with children, whether in a school or a day care setting;
- Background checks for virtual tutoring service providers required under the Family Law meet similar requirements set forth in the Education Law; and
- The virtual tutoring service shall conduct the background checks required under Section 5-555 of the Family Law on behalf of all individuals providing services to minors.

These changes ensure that Maryland's students who receive virtual tutoring services receive the same level of protection as they do for in-classroom learning, while allowing virtual tutoring services who are contracted with the counties to deploy their services at scale to help more students across the state.

I respectfully request a favorable report on Senate Bill 883 with amendments.