

FAVORABLE
Senate Bill 937
Grow Your Own Educators Program - Established

Senate Committee on Education, Energy, and the Environment
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The Maryland State Education Association strongly supports Senate Bill 937, which would establish the Grow Your Own Educators Grant program, a program to support education support professionals such as paraprofessionals who wish to gain teacher certification through local pathways. The program would provide grants to eligible collaboratives of local education agencies, institutions of higher education, and educators' unions. It would also establish requirements and best practices for the implementation and funding of Grow Your Own pathways.

MSEA represents 75,000 educators and school employees who work in Maryland's public schools, teaching and preparing our almost 900,000 students so they can pursue their dreams. MSEA also represents 39 local affiliates in every county across the state of Maryland, and our parent affiliate is the 3-million-member National Education Association (NEA).

Maryland continues to face educator shortages, high rates of teacher attrition, and a teaching workforce that is less racially and linguistically diverse than Maryland's students. Shortages are especially pronounced in areas such as special education, early childhood and elementary education, and English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). Last year, the Educator Shortage Reduction Act made great strides toward addressing these issues. However, one key element of the original bill, a \$5 million Grow Your Own Educators program, was amended out of the bill before it passed.

Federal ESSER funds expire this year, which means that local programs to develop teachers may not be able to continue. This is the time for Maryland to create a long-term Grow Your Own program that supports education support



professionals who wish to become classroom teachers. The Accountability and Implementation Board has identified this type of workforce development program as a tool to achieving the Blueprint's goal of a high-quality and diverse teacher workforce.

Studies suggest that education support professionals who become teachers are more effective and more likely to remain in the classroom than teachers prepared through other pathways. Maryland's education support professional workforce also better reflects the racial diversity of our students and communities than the current teaching workforce. Supporting education support professionals who are interested in becoming teachers will help Maryland meet our goal of diversifying the profession and may also improve teacher retention.

All education support professionals are essential and deserve a living wage whether or not they wish to become teachers. But those who do wish to become teachers should have the opportunity to do so without taking on debt or losing their job and benefits while they study. Education support professionals are already committed educators who work with students every day, and they are well positioned to continue that work in teaching roles if they choose to do so.

Importantly, this program in this bill is not intended to rely on state funding alone. The grant requirements would direct collaboratives to identify long-term funding sources such as federal funds for apprenticeships and high-need content areas. Passing this bill would codify best practices for Grow Your Own programs and support collaboratives in accessing creative funding sources to sustain these innovative, research-backed programs.

We urge the committee to issue a favorable report on Senate Bill 937.