



## House Bill 837

### *More Opportunities for Career-Focused Students Act of 2024*

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Ways and Means Committee

Date: February 14, 2024

From: Brianna January

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** HB 837. This bill seeks to help level the playing field for Maryland students wishing to pursue vocational education and careers instead of post-secondary education.

HB 837 would require schools to pay the exam fees for trade skills and apprenticeship certification if they do so for college preparatory course exams (like AP and IB exams) and to help connect students with vocational apprenticeship and career opportunities as they do for colleges and universities. This is in line with county priorities and with the requirements of The Blueprint for Maryland's Future (The Blueprint).

Maryland counties have historically supported alternative education and career paths, but doing so has recently become an even greater priority for local governments in response to the shifting labor market and workforce demands. Counties, like other employers, continue to face a shortage of vocational trade staff to hire or contract for critical infrastructure and public works projects. This raises county costs and pushes back project completion on key projects like building new schools and repairing roads and bridges – and Marylanders suffer for it.

Furthermore, acknowledging the growing trend and need to pursue vocational trades, The Blueprint places a large emphasis on Career and Technical Education (CTE) and apprenticeship and skills training. Counties are enthusiastic to implement this aspect of The Blueprint. In fact, in recent years, several counties have partnered with their local community colleges to develop educational and skill-building programs for high school students, and others have made historic budgetary investments to expand CTE programs in schools.

Maryland's students deserve access to every opportunity for post-K-12 success, and Maryland's public education priorities should reflect the modern needs of the labor market and workforce. HB 837 is a reasonable step to do so and for these reasons, MACo **SUPPORTS** HB 837 and urges a **FAVORABLE** report.