

Maureen Wambui

7827 Rolling View Ave, Nottingham, MD, 21236

Maureen.w.m.2030@gmail.com

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The Honorable Members of the House Committee

Maryland General Assembly, Annapolis, MD 21401

Testimony in Opposition to House Bill 1245 (HB1245) with recommendations - Blueprint for Maryland's Future – Alterations

Hearing Date: March 05, 2025

Chairperson and Esteemed Members of the Committee,

My name is Maureen Wambui, and I am a proud Immigrant, Parent, Community advocate and resident of Legislative District 8 in Maryland I am testifying today in **strong opposition with recommendations** to House Bill 1245, as it poses significant risks to immigrant students, low-income communities, and equitable access to quality education across Maryland.

Reasons for Opposition:

Repealing the Career Counseling Program Hurts Vulnerable Students

HB1245 proposes to eliminate the Career Counseling Program, a critical resource for students, especially those from immigrant and low-income backgrounds, who often lack access to career guidance at home. Without this program:

- Many first-generation students will struggle to navigate career pathways, college applications, and vocational training opportunities.
- Low-income and immigrant students, who may not have parental guidance on post-secondary education, will face additional disadvantages in preparing for the workforce.
- Maryland will risk increasing the education-to-unemployment gap for historically underserved communities.

Instead of repealing career counseling, the program should be expanded with multilingual counselors, financial aid guidance, and partnerships with businesses, trade schools, and community colleges.

Prekindergarten Access Must Be More Inclusive

While the bill expands eligibility for Tier I prekindergarten, it does not address barriers faced by mostly low-income families, such as:

- Lack of language access and outreach programs to inform non-English-speaking parents about available pre-K programs.
- Transportation challenges that prevent many low-income families from enrolling their children in early education.
- A shortage of bilingual educators and culturally responsive teaching methods to support English Language Learners (ELLs).

The bill should include targeted outreach programs, funding for pre-K transportation, and hiring bilingual teachers to ensure greater equity in early childhood education.

School Funding Transparency Must Prioritize Low-Income Schools

The bill requires county boards to report school funding allocations, yet it does not mandate an equitable distribution model. Schools with high immigrant and low-income populations often lack the same level of funding, leading to disparities in:

- Access to updated learning materials, technology, and extracurricular programs.
- Student support services, such as mental health counselors and tutoring programs.
- Resources to address the needs of ELL and special education students.

The bill should require a needs-based funding model and community input sessions to ensure funds are fairly allocated to the most underserved schools.

Lack of Support for English Language Learners (ELLs)

Maryland has a growing number of ELL students, yet HB1245 does not allocate resources to improve language support services. Without additional investment in ESL programs:

- ELL students may fall behind due to insufficient classroom support.
- Schools may lack trained ESL teachers to meet the demand for bilingual instruction.
- Immigrant families may struggle to engage in their children's education due to language barriers.

The bill should increase ESL funding, expand dual-language programs, and provide teacher training in culturally responsive instruction.

Eliminating Career Counseling Weakens Workforce Pathways

Without career counseling, students, especially those in underserved communities—will struggle to access vocational training, apprenticeships, and workforce development programs. The removal of this program directly contradicts Maryland's goal of preparing students for high-demand industries and economic self-sufficiency.

Instead of cutting the program, Maryland should strengthen vocational education, increase scholarships for trade schools, and create internship opportunities for low-income students.

HB1245, as currently written, undermines the educational success of immigrant students, low-income families, and English Language Learners. While there are positive aspects of the bill, it needs major revisions to prevent harm to Maryland's most vulnerable students.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to reject HB1245 in its current form and amend it to prioritize equity, access, and support for all students.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Maureen Wambui