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March 3, 2025

The Honorable Ben Barnes, Chair
House Appropriations Committee
120 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Subject: Opposition to HB 1245 – Protecting Career Counseling for Maryland Students

Dear Chairman Barnes and Members of the House Appropriations Committee and the Ways & Means Committee,

As the director of the career coaching program, Student Career Excellence (SCE), in Anne Arundel County, I am writing to express that I vehemently oppose HB 1245, eliminating the middle and high school career counseling program. This program is imperative for preparing young people for their future. As someone who has been deeply invested in the well-being of Maryland's youth for over 20 years, I believe a decision to end the career counseling programs would have a detrimental effect on all students, but especially disadvantaged students, who stand to benefit the most from this program and the critical services it provides.

Career counseling programs are instrumental in guiding students through the often-overwhelming transition from school to either the workforce or college. Career counseling offers much-needed support, including awareness of career options, goal-setting, resume-building, interview techniques, and insight into the necessary steps to achieve long-term professional success. For many students, these programs provide the necessary conversations, structure, and encouragement needed to envision and plan for a future that might otherwise seem uncertain, intimidating, or unattainable.

Anne Arundel County's Student Career Excellence program has been in the implementation phase since September 2023. We were only in middle schools for the first year, 2023-24. However, this school year, 2024-25, we have expanded career coaching to the high schools. We do not pigeonhole students into a "one size fits all" box. Career Coaches introduce all the options (e.g., apprenticeships, college, military, entry into the workforce with necessary credentials and certifications) to students, allowing them to explore and discover how their interests, strengths, values, and talents translate and align with specific careers and industries. We engage students in numerous career-centric activities such as career interest surveys, personality tests (e.g., Holland Code), career day events, guest speakers, field trips, and summer camp opportunities to expand their awareness and exposure to careers. **Anne Arundel County's career coaching program is year-round, not just during the school year.** We encourage students to apply the information they have learned in the classrooms and schoolhouses to real-world situations to deepen their foundational understanding of careers and how they will eventually integrate into the workforce.

Last summer, Anne Arundel Workforce Development Corporation collaborated with our partner, Anne Arundel Community College, to provide over 100 middle-school students with firsthand learning opportunities about various careers, including culinary arts, entrepreneurship, skilled trades, advanced robotics, and YouTube content creator. Additionally, we sponsored 87 middle and high school students to attend a residential leadership camp where they learned about leadership styles, self-awareness and identity, communication skills, public speaking, ethical decision-making, advocacy, motivation and empowerment, project management, conflict management, and creative problem solving,

Eliminating career counseling programs not only undermines the aspirations of our youth but will also create a void in essential services that can help young people make informed decisions about their education and career paths. Without professional input and guidance from the local workforce boards, many students will struggle to navigate the complexities of the modern job market, which is more competitive and ever-changing than ever before. The lack of dedicated career counseling staff could lead to missed opportunities and, in some cases, a delay in students reaching their full potential.

Furthermore, career counseling programs do more than just inform—they instill confidence. Our programs foster a sense of empowerment and direction that can positively impact a young person's academic and personal life. We help instill a mindset of resilience, perseverance, and adaptability, qualities that are indispensable in today's rapidly evolving world. Career counseling programs are building the future workforce pipeline. We are working to ensure that when students reach the end of their 12th-grade year, they leave with their diploma in one hand, their career plan in the other, and a sense of empowerment to walk confidently into the next phase of their lives and own it.

The career counseling programs are **NOT UGLY**, nor are they **"TRAIN WRECKS,"** as the Public School Superintendents' Association has portrayed them to be. Perhaps, if the public school system would stop with the "superiority complex" and being narcissistic in believing that they can do it better than the local workforce boards, they can do it without the local workforce boards, that they have all the answers, and that it is "their way or no way," then the majority of the career counseling programs around the State would be further along. However, the career counseling programs and the local workforce boards have faced tremendous opposition, defiance, and resistance from the public school system since the beginning. It would benefit the students if the public school system would let go of its defensive posture and learn how to truly partner and be an ally with the local workforce boards.

The Public School Superintendents' Association is prioritizing money (dollars) over what is genuinely in the best interest of all students in the State of Maryland.

In light of these considerations, I urge you to reconsider the decision to eliminate this valuable program. By keeping the career counseling program in place, we can ensure that our young people are equipped with the skills, knowledge, and support necessary to thrive in their future careers and contribute to our State's economy.

Thank you for taking the time to read my letter. I welcome the opportunity to share more about how career coaching is positively impacting students across Maryland.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Savage Dupré, M.Ed.
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