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**Board of Education of Howard County  
Testimony Submitted to the Maryland House of Delegates,  
Appropriations and Ways & Means Committee  
March 5, 2025**

Good afternoon Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Chang, members of the Appropriations Committee, as well as Ways and Means Committee members who have joined today, I am Jennifer Swickard Mallo. I am here today as both a member of the Board of Education of Howard County and as Chair of the Maryland Association of Boards of Education Legislative Committee to offer strong support for HB1245.

Coming into this legislative session, MABE on behalf of Maryland's 24 boards heard a resounding request from legislators to pinpoint areas of the Blueprint that should be amended. We all recognize the enormity of this work, and have celebrated the Blueprint's successes thus far. But we must also realize that nothing is perfect the first time you try, and there would eventually be changes to smooth out the implementation of the Blueprint. That's what HB1245 does. The Maryland Public School Superintendent's Association took on a herculean task to work collectively with local school system Implementation Coordinators - pillar by pillar - and create thoughtful measures to amend the law without altering the goals of the Blueprint. Their findings matched insights shared by local education officials in a Blueprint survey MABE conducted last fall.

Of the many proposals, I want to highlight just two in the time I have today.

Under pillar one, early childhood education, HB1245 reflects local school systems understanding of the intent of the Blueprint to expand universal access to prekindergarten for the state's most vulnerable populations. In Howard County alone, our staff estimates there are 160 students enrolled in full-day prekindergarten programs who are receiving special education services but do not fall into Tier I. These students are identified as a priority under the law, yet not for funding purposes along with multilingual learners. Previously introduced bills have attempted to rectify this area of the law as proposed by HB1245 with large fiscal notes. This is an important education policy however that should not be hampered by the fiscal impact.

Under pillar three, college and career readiness, HB1245 addresses an area we have often discussed across school districts when it comes to ways the Blueprint could provide greater flexibility for each county. The current requirement to cover all post-college and career costs for students is one of the innovative approaches in the Blueprint to propel students forward by removing fiscal barriers. For that reason, it is also costly for local school systems. By giving the authority to develop income eligibility guidelines to local boards of education, HB1245 addresses the fiscal impact of this one-size-fits-all requirement under the Blueprint.

I hope today's hearing will be a chance to learn more about the areas of HB1245 I was not able to address. We urge a favorable report from this Committee to not only uplift the recommendations of those who are living and breathing the Blueprint on a daily basis, but also to maintain its integrity as we all move forward with implementation together.