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February 25th, 2025

The Honorable Brian Feldman, Chair
Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment
2 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Subject: Opposition to SB 852 – Protecting Career Counseling for Maryland Students

Dear Chairman Feldman and Members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee and the Budget and Taxation Committee,

My name is Autumn Meyers and I am a high school career coach with Anne Arundel Workforce Development Corporation, serving Northeast High School. Speaking before the Maryland Legislature wasn't exactly on my Bingo card for this year, yet here I am. And to be honest, I'm disappointed my job, my livelihood, is even up for debate.

I was born and raised in Baltimore into a family of blue-collar workers. I didn't come from money; I was brought up to work hard for what I want. Growing up in the city, I saw firsthand how communities struggle without the very resources that are being deliberated today. Many of my peers, lacking guidance and support, have turned to drugs and other means to survive. My family moved to Anne Arundel County for me to have a better education opportunity. I was an honor roll student and attended classes at the Center of Applied Technology North (CATN). Like many millennials, I was told that college was the only path to success, I didn't have a career coach to guide me. So I went to college, ended up switching my major three times and eventually dropped out because I couldn't afford the debt I was building. In desperation, I enlisted in the Army National Guard, believing it would be my way forward. But I couldn't even make it through the basic training.

Without direction, I worked multiple jobs—retail by day, door-to-door sales at night, and physically demanding warehouse jobs that had me climbing ladders and carrying bathtubs on my back while pregnant because I didn't understand my rights as an employee. When I became a single mother, I worked six days a week just to keep a roof over my head. That first winter, I couldn't afford an oil furnace and relied on a space heater and winter coats in my living room. It wasn't until I pursued a welding certification—taking night classes while still working—that I was able to get back on my feet financially. That opportunity gave me the foundation to re-enroll in college and I ultimately earned my bachelor's degree in Human Resources Management.

My work in human resources gave me firsthand experience with various aspects of the workforce, including applicant tracking, background checks and hiring processes. Prior to becoming a career coach, I worked in workforce reentry, helping individuals in Baltimore and DC transition back into society from federal prison. Without these programs, people are lost. I've seen what happens when individuals don't have the guidance and support they need to navigate their careers or to simply keep their bills paid.

I am a living, breathing example of why career workforce counseling is essential in our public schools. My students deserve better than what I had. They deserve to explore careers beyond the pressure of a four-year degree. They deserve to feel confident and prepared for the workforce. Through my career coaching, I've made real impacts—helping students craft resumes, build interview skills and explore non-traditional career paths. One of my students is exploring mental health careers with me to advocate for teen mental health. I've presented my resume workshop in special education classrooms and created an inclusive space where students who are unsure of their futures feel safe and supported. Since starting my role, I have helped hundreds of students with career-centric lessons, group sessions and individual appointments.

And my work doesn't stop in the classroom. My upcoming career fair in March will bring 25+ representatives, including local police and fire departments, the library, hospitals, businesses, the Y of Central Maryland, MD Live Casino, BGE, the military, The Blue Ribbon Project, my career center, and Earlbeck Gases & Technologies—the very place where I earned my welding credentials to get back on my feet.

Do not think for a second that our already overworked school guidance counseling departments are going to take over this initiative. They are already overwhelmed scheduling and working with students with mental health issues who lack the support they need at home.

The impact of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future is critical—not just for my students, but for future generations. We are living in an ever-changing, challenging workforce environment and it is our responsibility to ensure that students have the tools to navigate it successfully. I urge you to recognize the necessity of career workforce counseling in public schools. It is not an option—it is a necessity.

Thank you for your time.

Thank you,

Autumn Meyers

