

My name is Spencer Evans. I currently serve as an In-School Youth Career Coach for the Anne Arundel Workforce Development Corporation, working with students in 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> grades. I believe that every student should have access to the tools that allow them to become successful as they become adults and make their mark in the world. As we are currently dealing with an everchanging job market and a skillset mismatch that adversely affects our economy, it is important for our students to receive the necessary career coaching services to equip them with the tools they need to thrive.

For some students, career coaching is confirmation of their plans and goals. For others, career coaching is a way to gain information that they may not otherwise have access to. For all students, however, it helps them explore their passions, understand their strengths, navigate pathways that are accessible to them, and set themselves up for life as they know it. This support is crucial for fostering self-awareness and empowering students to make informed decisions about their educational and professional paths.

Now, let's consider the negative impacts of not having access to career coaching services:

- **Lack of Direction:** Without career coaching, students may feel lost and uncertain about their future. This can lead to indecision and anxiety, making it difficult for them to select appropriate courses or extracurricular activities that align with their interests and goals.
- **Missed Opportunities:** Many students may not be aware of the various career pathways available to them, particularly those in high-demand fields. The absence of career coaching can mean missing out on scholarships, internships, and vocational programs that could set them on a successful trajectory.
- **Increased Dropout Rates:** A lack of guidance can result in disengagement from school. When students don't see a clear connection between their education and future careers, they may lose motivation and ultimately drop out, closing the door on countless opportunities.
- **Inequity and Disadvantage:** Students from underserved backgrounds are especially affected. Without access to career coaching, they may not have the same exposure to resources and networks that could help them succeed. This perpetuates cycles of inequality, limiting their potential and contributing to broader societal disparities.
- **Workforce Preparedness:** Finally, a workforce that lacks coaching can lead to a skills gap in our economy. Employers often struggle to find candidates with the right qualifications and soft skills, further hindering economic growth.

To conclude, career coaching in middle and high schools is not merely a luxury; it is essential for preparing our students for the real world in a way that addresses some fears and issues they may encounter on their journey while allowing them to explore opportunities that are within their reach. By investing in comprehensive career coaching programs, we can empower every student to explore their potential, find their passion, and build the skills necessary for a fulfilling career.

I ask that you oppose House Bill 1245 and ensure that no student is left without the guidance they need to succeed. ALL students deserve every opportunity to thrive.

Respectfully,

Spencer Evans