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03/02/2025

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,

I hope this letter finds you well. As a student in Anne Arundel County, I am writing to express my strong opposition to SB 852, which would eliminate the Career Counseling Program for Middle and High School Students. As a student who greatly benefits from the guidance provided by my career coach Ms. Jackson, I strongly believe that eliminating this resource would have a negative impact on students like me.

Career coaching is not just about preparing for a job; it is about helping students understand their interests, strengths, and the possibilities available to them. Many of us enter high school or college without a clear direction or understanding of how to translate our skills and passions into a future career. Career coaches help bridge this gap by providing personalized advice, exploring career paths, and helping us set realistic goals.

Without this support, students may struggle to navigate the overwhelming number of career options, leading to confusion and uncertainty. Many students, including myself, rely on career coaches to help make informed decisions about which courses to take, internships to pursue, and potential job opportunities to consider. Career coaching offers valuable insight into the skills and qualifications required for various professions, as well as the changing demands of the job market. This information is crucial as we make choices that will affect our futures.

Furthermore, career coaches provide a much-needed emotional support system. The pressure to succeed academically while also planning for a career can be daunting. Career coaches offer a safe space to discuss our aspirations and fears, ensuring that we don't feel alone in the process. They also help with resume writing, interview preparation, and networking, all of which are critical skills that are often not taught in the classroom.

Removing career coaching would not only disadvantage students by denying us access to these important resources, but it could also amplify inequalities. Students who do not have the same level of parental support or outside resources would be especially harmed, as career coaches often help level the playing field for those who may not have the same exposure to professional opportunities.

In conclusion, career coaching is an essential service that supports students in developing a clear vision for their future. Without it, many students like me would face even more challenges in navigating the complex transition from school to career. I urge you to reconsider any plans to remove these services, as they are vital to our success.

Removing this program would:

- **Hurt students** by limiting their access to career exploration, job readiness training, and employer connections.
- **Hurt employers** who rely on a skilled talent pipeline to meet workforce demands in high-growth industries.
- **Hurt Maryland's economy**, as students graduate without clear pathways into family-sustaining careers, leading to higher unemployment and skills gaps.

Rather than eliminating a program that is already proving successful, Maryland should be investing further in career coaching and workforce-aligned career counseling. I urge you to reject HB 1245 and preserve the Career Counseling Program for Middle and High School Students. Maryland must continue investing in the future of its students, ensuring they have the knowledge, skills, and support necessary to thrive in their careers and contribute to our state's economy.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I welcome the opportunity to share more about how career coaching is positively impacting students across Maryland.

Sincerely,

Leilani Jones-Johnson