



**TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE BUDGET & TAXATION AND EDUCATION, ENERGY AND THE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEES; THE HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS AND WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEES**

**SB429/HB504 Excellence in Maryland Public Schools Act**

**Position: Unfavorable**

**By: Linda T. Kohn, President**

**Date: February 19, 2025**

The League of Women Voters of Maryland (LWVMD) is a nonpartisan organization that supports policies that provide an equitable, adequate, and quality education for all children. LWVMD recognizes that the primary responsibility for funding public elementary and secondary education lies with the state. It supports a foundation program based on a weighted per pupil formula that is supported from general state revenues at a level high enough to eliminate inequities. LWVMD requests an **unfavorable report on SB429/HB504, Excellence in Maryland Public Schools Act**, because this bill makes cuts to public education that will hurt our most vulnerable students. It also breaks the promise of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future (Blueprint).

**Significant Cuts to Foundation Per Pupil Funding**

Senate Bill 429/House Bill 405 reduces the per pupil foundation amount over seven fiscal years. For example, in FY2026 the \$9,226 per pupil amount allocation will be cut to \$9,063. By FY2033, instead of reaching \$12,365, per pupil funding will be reduced to \$11,536. **By cutting the foundation per pupil funding, the bill lowers total education spending over time and undermines the state's commitment to the Blueprint.** Cuts to per-pupil foundation funding will mean fewer resources for classrooms, including teacher salaries, instructional materials, and critical student services.

**Negative Trickle Down Effects on the Most Vulnerable Students**

Since funding for compensatory education students (low-income students) and multilingual learners is calculated as a percentage of the per-pupil foundation amount, cuts to per-pupil funding means cuts to funding for these vulnerable groups of students.

- Cuts to compensatory education funding means less money for intervention programs, tutoring, support and wraparound services that help students from historically underfunded communities.
- Multilingual learners will lose funding for language programs and other services.
- While the funding for special education services may be "held harmless" in the bill, students with disabilities will be harmed by other cuts. Since many of these students also qualify for compensatory education and multilingual services, cuts to these programs will negatively impact them. Special education students are also negatively impacted by cuts to the per-pupil foundation funding.



SB429/HB504 pauses funding for teacher collaborative time, a program proven to improve teaching and student achievement. At a time when Maryland is experiencing a teacher shortage, delaying collaborative time grants will prevent teachers from receiving necessary professional development and sufficient time for planning. These grants help educators collaborate, improve instruction, and better support students. Given the state's teacher shortage, collaborative time policies also serve as an effective teacher recruitment and retention tool.

### **Concentration of Poverty Grants Paused; Community Schools Impacted**

The bill pauses increases in the Concentration of Poverty per pupil grants for FY2027 and FY2028 thereby stalling the expansion of Community Schools. Any school that receives a Concentration of Poverty Grant is a Community School. This cut disproportionately harms students who need the most support and investment and undermines an evidence-based intervention. The community school model has been shown to improve student and school outcomes and contribute to meeting the educational needs of low-achieving students in high poverty schools.<sup>1</sup>

The bill also proposes providing a flexibility allowance for Local Education Agencies (LEA) to withhold up to 50% of the Concentration of Poverty grants. Instead of going directly to schools, resources could be used for central office administrative costs or services. This negatively impacts the services a community schools can provide. While some flexibility may be needed to cover district level administrative costs, 50% is too high. The purpose of Community Schools is to direct resources to schools, not to administrative agencies. Instead, we suggest the amount LEAs may use to provide central office support to manage program funds and other administrative cases be reduced to 10%.

### **Cuts to Behavioral Health Services**

Further, the bill would permanently reduce the mandate for Coordinated Community Supports, which provides resources for behavioral health services. Maryland schools already suffer from a shortage of school counselors and behavioral health providers. The state currently has only one school social worker for every 2,324 students compared to the recommended ratio of 250:1, one school counselor for every 362 students compared to the recommended ratio of 250:1, and one school psychologist for every 1,198 students compared to the recommended ratio of 500:1.<sup>2</sup> These funding cuts will further restrict behavioral health staff from providing the support services that students need.

### **Other Initiatives Divert Resources from the Schools**

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<sup>1</sup> Bill, K., Rodriguez, S., Blazer, D., & Carson, N. (2024). *Community school expansion in Maryland: Promise and precarity*. College Park, MD: University of Maryland College of Education, Maryland Equity Project. Retrieved from <https://education.umd.edu/sites/default/files/uploads/inline-files/Community%20schools%20brief.pdf>

Maier, A., Daniel, J., Oakes, J., & Lam, L. (2017). *Community schools as an effective school improvement strategy: A review of the evidence*. Learning Policy Institute & National Education Policy Center. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED606765.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Carson, N., Bill, K. & Rodriguez, S. (2024). *Navigating the crisis: School district approaches to alleviating behavioral health staff shortages*. College Park, MD: University of Maryland College of Education, Maryland Equity Project. Retrieved from [https://education.umd.edu/sites/default/files/uploads/inline-files/MBH%20staff%20shortages%20brief\\_in%20template%20-%20Google%20Docs\\_0.pdf](https://education.umd.edu/sites/default/files/uploads/inline-files/MBH%20staff%20shortages%20brief_in%20template%20-%20Google%20Docs_0.pdf)



SB429/HB504 creates an unnecessary Academic Excellence Fund that proposes grants to county boards, higher education institutions, nonprofit organizations, or other entities to provide professional development and other services, including program evaluation and administrative services. It is unclear why this Fund is being proposed since the goal of the Blueprint is to provide an equitable and excellent education to all students, including those in schools identified as underperforming. Money budgeted for this could be better used to restore the foundation per pupil funding and thus the weighted formulas that would provide resources directly to schools with highest needs.

The bill also redirects resources to other initiatives, such as the Maryland School Leadership Academy, and the Interstate Mobility Compact that are not specifically targeted on vulnerable students. The Interstate Mobility Compact already exists outside the Blueprint, and the Leadership Academy fails to prioritize school level leadership. These provisions and others in the bill also redirect resources from schools to MSDE and to outside, private providers. LWVMD supports the Grow Your Own Educators Grant Program, which can help to address teacher shortage and diversify the workforce, which is being successfully implemented in Maryland.<sup>3</sup> Schools need the resources, not MSDE or private companies.

LWVMD opposes the Maryland Teacher Relocation Incentive Grant. This grant would provide up to \$2,000 in reimbursement to out-of-state licensed teachers as an incentive to move to Maryland to address the State's teacher shortage. Instead of sending money to out-of-state residents, these resources would be better used by helping the 6,598 conditionally licensed teachers employed in LEAs receive full certification.<sup>4</sup>

### **Not a Long-Term Solution**

LWVMD is fully aware of the budget crisis facing Maryland. But cutting support for education aimed at our most vulnerable students is not the way to address it. A long-term solution that would help education is the Fair Share for Maryland Act of 2025 (HB 1014/SB 859), which proposes a number of reforms to the state's tax code. HB1014/SB859 would make the state's income taxes more progressive and close a number of corporate and LLC tax loopholes, among other provisions. The Fair Share Act would raise \$1.6 billion to address the deficit compared to the \$1 billion of new revenues raised by the Governor's bill.<sup>5</sup>

The Blueprint for Maryland's Future was designed to boost achievement for all students, but in particular, it concentrated resources at schools with the largest numbers of poor students and the lowest achievement. SB429/HB 504 undermines that promise.

### **LWVMD recommends an unfavorable report on SB429/HB504.**

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<sup>3</sup> Blazer, D., Gao, W., Gershenson, S., Goings, R. & Lagos, F. (2024). "Grow-your-own" programs can help expand and diversify the teacher workforce. College Park, MD: University of Maryland College of Education, Maryland Equity Project. Retrieved from [https://education.umd.edu/sites/default/files/uploads/inline-files/MEP%20Brief\\_Grow%20Your%20Own%20Programs.pdf](https://education.umd.edu/sites/default/files/uploads/inline-files/MEP%20Brief_Grow%20Your%20Own%20Programs.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Maryland State Department of Education (2024). *Maryland's Teacher Workforce: Supply, Demand, and Diversity*. Retrieved from <https://marylandpublicschools.org/stateboard/Documents/2024/0521/Maryland-Teacher-Workforce-Supply-Demand-and-Diversity-A.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Fair Share Maryland (2025). <https://fairsharemaryland.org/fair-share-maryland-revenue-legislation-to-be-introduced/>