



Office of The Mayor Celina Benitez

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Monday, February 17, 2025

Re: Opposition to Senate Bill 429: Excellence in Maryland Public Schools Act

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

On behalf of the City of Mount Rainier, we submit this testimony in opposition to Senate Bill 429. This bill threatens the vital funding commitments made under the Blueprint for Maryland's Future, jeopardizing the quality of education for students in our community.

As a city that is home to two Title I schools—Mount Rainier Elementary School (MRES) and Thomas S. Stone Elementary (TSE)—we are deeply concerned about the devastating impact of this bill. According to projections from Strong Schools Maryland based on Maryland State Department of Education data, PGCPS is facing a catastrophic \$1 billion cut in per-pupil funding between FY26 and FY33.

The impact on our schools is staggering:

- **Mount Rainier Elementary School (MRES)** is projected to lose **\$1.978 million in funding between FY27 and FY31**, ranking among the largest cuts per capita in Prince George's County. For context, our entire school budget for the 2024-25 academic year is **\$1.85 million**—a cut of this magnitude would be unsustainable and catastrophic.
- **Thomas S. Stone Elementary School (TSE)** faces a **\$1.316 million reduction**, further stripping essential resources from students who rely on these services the most.

Our local community schools, like MRES and TSE, heavily depend on **Concentration of Poverty Grant funding**, which provides critical support such as mental health services, after-school programs, and multilingual support. The passage of SB 429 would dismantle these essential programs, widening the achievement gap and leaving our most vulnerable students without the resources they need to thrive.

Additionally, cuts to per-pupil foundation funding will force schools to make difficult decisions, such as increasing class sizes, cutting instructional materials, and reducing staff. At a time when Maryland is already facing a teacher shortage, these funding reductions will only exacerbate the issue, making it harder to recruit and retain highly qualified educators.

Maryland made a commitment to improving education through the Blueprint, and now is not the time to backtrack on that promise. Instead of reducing funding, we urge the legislature to **prioritize progressive revenue solutions through the passage of Fair Share Maryland** to ensure sustainable, equitable investment in our schools.

We strongly urge you to **reject Senate Bill 429** and stand with the students, families, and educators who depend on the Blueprint's full implementation. Cutting funding now will have long-term

consequences that extend far beyond our schools—our entire community will bear the burden of these losses.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Should you require any additional information, please do not hesitate to contact our office 301-985-6585 or via email MayorBenitez@MountRainierMD.org

Sincerely,



Mayor Celina R. Benitez, City of Mount Rainier