

**Testimony in OPPOSITION of  
Senate 429: Excellence in Maryland Public Schools Act**

**Budget and Taxation Committee/Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee**

**Position: Oppose**

**February 12, 2025**

My name is Gretchen M. Tome, and I am a Baltimore resident and School Social Worker, living and working in District 45. I am submitting this testimony **in strong opposition to Senate Bill 429**, which would significantly cut promised education funding under the Blueprint for Maryland's Future. This bill undermines the investments our state has committed to making in our students, our teachers, and the future of our communities.

**CHOOSE ONE OR TWO OF THE FOLLOWING POINTS:**

Cuts to per-pupil foundation funding will mean fewer resources for classrooms, including teacher salaries, instructional materials, and critical student services. Schools already struggling to meet the needs of students will be forced to make tough choices, like increasing class sizes. Without adequate funding, many teachers will leave the profession, making teacher shortages worse.

This year alone, the school that I work at, Elmer A. Henderson: A Hopkins Partnership School, cut three teaching positions, has frozen a School Counselor position, and has several staff members, myself included, working more than one full-time position. Cutting teaching positions lead to increased class sizes in the 6th and 8th grade, increasing stress on teachers and decreasing personalized attention and support that students need. Without a School Counselor, one of the many important roles that they fill is managing the High School Choice process for our 8th graders, ensuring that they are aware of their options, the process, and get into schools that are the best fit. An Instructional Coach has had to take on that responsibility. While they are doing it to the best of their ability, it isn't the same as having the work done by School Counselor who is trained to provide this service to our students.

At a time when Maryland is experiencing a teacher shortage, delaying collaborative time grants will prevent teachers from receiving necessary professional development and planning time. These grants help educators collaborate, improve instruction, and better support students. Without them, schools will struggle to retain talented teachers. As a School Social Worker, I work with students who receive special education services and collaborating with teachers is a big part of my job. Due to shortages our school already faces, I have to also serve as my school's 504 Chair, misusing my clinical skills and training, and taking away time that I could be working with teachers to better support students' needs and serving as a bridge between families and our school. Being able to focus on my role as a School Social Worker would allow me to get to know our students and families better, have time to develop community partnerships, and have time to support teachers in providing special education services.

Delays in funding for community schools will widen the achievement gap and leave vulnerable students without the necessary support systems. Schools that were promised additional resources through Concentration of Poverty grants will not see the funds when they need them most. These grants provide essential services such as mental health care, after-school programs, and multilingual support for students. As a School Social Worker, I see firsthand how many students are struggling with mental health. If I didn't have to split my time between my role as a School Social Worker, a job that I went to school for and have 20 years experience doing, with the role of 504 Chair (which is meant to be filled by someone with a special education teaching background), I would have more availability to provide mental health supports in classrooms, small groups, and with individual students.

Maryland made a commitment to improving education through the Blueprint, but SB429 weakens these efforts when schools need support the most. Rather than cutting funding, the legislature should uphold its promise to students, educators, and families by maintaining the investments that were pledged.

I urge you to reject Senate Bill 429 and prioritize the future of Maryland's students - prioritize generating progressive revenue through the passage of Fair Share Maryland. Cutting funding now will have long-term consequences that harm not just our schools, but our communities as a whole. Please vote no on SB429 and stand with those who believe in fully funding the Blueprint for Maryland's Future.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Gretchen M. Tome, LCSW-C

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