

**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 14, 2025

My name is Jaleah Lennon, and I am a student from Howard County. 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 students, educators, and the future of our communities.

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 students' needs will be forced to make difficult choices, such as increasing class sizes and reducing extracurricular opportunities. Without adequate funding, teacher shortages will worsen as more educators leave the profession due to unsustainable working conditions.

In my own school, Guilford Park High School, these funding gaps have real consequences. As a newly established school with fewer built-up resources, we rely on promised funding to provide a quality education. Class sizes for high schools in my county have ballooned to around 33 students per class in the upper range, making individualized attention nearly impossible and increasing distractions. The strain on teachers is significant, as some must split their time between multiple schools due to funding shortages, adding stress and diminishing their ability to provide consistent support to students.

Additionally, transportation cuts have made it difficult for students to participate in extracurricular activities such as debate, student council, and fine arts programs. In the arts, funding shortages have limited access to essential resources like music assessments and multiple ensemble opportunities, which are crucial for a well-rounded education. These programs foster creativity, discipline, and teamwork—skills that are just as vital as core academic subjects.

Delays in funding for community schools will also widen the achievement gap and leave vulnerable students without the support systems they need. The Concentration of Poverty grants were designed to provide essential services such as mental health care, after-school programs, and multilingual support. As someone who received the bulk of my education in Prince George's County—where over 60% of students qualified for free and reduced meals and 25.7% were multilingual learners—I have seen firsthand how these programs can make a difference. Despite its challenges, my former school offered the International Baccalaureate program, giving students access to advanced coursework they would not otherwise have had. However, we lacked access to AP and honors classes that students in wealthier districts, such as Howard County, take for granted.

Maryland has a responsibility to ensure educational equity. The students in Prince George's County—where 131 schools receive a Concentration of Poverty Grant—deserve the same opportunities as those in more affluent areas. If I had not moved to Howard County, I would not have had access to the same academic resources, and that disparity is unacceptable. No child should be denied opportunities due to where they live, and delaying funding for these critical programs only reinforces systemic inequities.

The Blueprint for Maryland's Future was a promise to students, educators, and families. SB429 weakens that commitment at a time when schools need support the most. Rather than cutting funding, the legislature should

focus on maintaining these essential investments. One way to do so is by generating progressive revenue through the passage of Fair Share Maryland, ensuring that our education system remains adequately funded without placing additional burdens on those already struggling.

I urge you to reject Senate Bill 429 and prioritize the future of Maryland's students. 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,

Jaleah Lennon

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