

**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 19, 2025

My name is Anna Weisberg, and I am an educator from Baltimore, Maryland. 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.

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. I started teaching in Maryland in 2015. Now, ten years in, not a week goes by that I don't consider a career change. This is an improvement. A year ago, I was considering a career change almost daily. This year's improvements to strategic collaborative planning have made my work feel more strategic and effective. I've had the opportunity to co-plan with the other grades 3-5 ELA teachers in my building a couple times this year. We've shared techniques for improving student writing and looked at student work samples together to build a common set of expectations from our young writers. **This bill stands to take this essential collaborative time away from educators across the state.**

More, not less, is needed to adequately support the learning of the almost fifty third graders each day with no additional adult support. 75 percent of one of my classes scored below the 21st percentile on their state tests last spring. Let me repeat that: 75 percent of one of my classes scored below the 21st percentile on their state tests last spring. A large number of them need reading intervention, but last year's budget cuts led to a reduction in reading specialists. This year we have only 1.5 reading specialists to serve over 630 students. Due to our limited staffing, it took all of the first quarter for us to finish identifying which students needed which intervention and to figure out how we could allocate staff to provide it. At first, it was determined that I would provide intervention to two of the groups. So I would try to deliver the intervention while the rest of the class worked independently. It's just me and twenty-four 8- and 9-year-olds. It turns out that I am not sufficiently magical to manage 19 mostly below-level readers doing independent work while delivering a research-based, scripted reading intervention to the other four students. We made a new plan, but **more precious time to close learning gaps was lost as we figured this out, trying to accommodate our grossly inadequate staffing.**

We already are insufficiently staffed. I have a student who is making loud, random noises in an effort to avoid instruction and get attention. We are working on identifying what additional support and services he might need, but in the meantime, he is making increasingly loud noises almost daily. Roughly 25% of the time, no one can come help. Administrations and support staff are stretched too thinly. So the other students and I try, as we've been instructed, to ignore the noises, but it is difficult for us to focus. Sometimes when we ignore the noises, the child starts knocking over classroom furniture, or he walks out and then I must stand with one foot in the class and one in the hall, telling the class to proceed with some practice work I'm improvising on the fly, while I call for help on the walkie and hope someone can come soon. This is stressful. This is unjust. The learning of my entire class is held hostage by our staffing limitations. And mine is just one classroom in one school. I am exhausted from trying to fill multiple roles every day.

I am told I must have a class library, but am given no budget. I am told my students must do their online fluency intervention daily, but that the district cannot provide extra charging cables, headphones, or backup student devices. If I want the resources students need to be successful, I must acquire the needed tools. The state is exploiting my good will and care- robbing me of all it can. There is nothing left in me.

We urgently need more resources, not fewer.

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,

Anna

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