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BILL: SB 673

TITLE: Education - Maryland STEM Program - Established

DATE: March 5, 2025

POSITION: Unfavorable

COMMITTEE: Education, Energy & the Environment Committee

CONTACT: Mary Pat Fannon, Executive Director, PSSAM

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The Public School Superintendents' Association of Maryland (PSSAM), on behalf of all twenty-four local school superintendents, **opposes** Senate Bill 673.

This bill establishes the Maryland STEM Program within the Department of Education to provide additional compensation to educators who teach STEM classes at nonpublic schools. It also incentivizes current teachers to obtain the necessary qualifications to teach STEM subjects, thereby improving statewide access to STEM education to address workforce demands in the state. The bill authorizes nonpublic schools to apply for the program and requires participating nonpublic schools to report certain information to the Department annually. Additionally, it allows local school systems to object to certain teachers participating in the program under specific circumstances. Furthermore, the bill mandates that the Department develop a teacher interest survey and share certain information with nonpublic schools upon request. It also requires local school systems to inform relevant teachers about the program annually and distribute the interest survey to certain teachers each year. For each fiscal year, the governor shall include in the annual budget bill an appropriation of \$250,000 to the Department for grants under the program.

PSSAM opposes the establishment of any funding stream that financially benefits private and nonpublic schools. The financial needs of our public school students must take priority over those who choose a private or parochial education. Any educational initiatives funded using State or local taxpayer dollars should only be for public school students and staff.

While this legislation would financially benefit teachers, the legislation is flawed in a number of ideological and practical ways. The bill contemplates new funds diverted from public education, but also requires that local school systems participate in the administration of the program. Local school systems must also notify all current teachers from their system about the opportunity to participate in the program, and share the teacher interest survey developed by the Department with all teachers employed at the local school system. The legislation is silent regarding any retirement or other employee-related compensation complications this might create. These administrative expectations are unreasonable and excessive given the existing responsibilities of local school systems in delivering public education in taxpayer-supported schools. Providing this level of support for private institutions is a serious departure from the State's constitutional mandate to provide a fair and equitable public education system.

For these reasons, PSSAM **opposes** Senate Bill 673 and kindly requests an unfavorable report.