



Senate Bill 852

Blueprint for Maryland's Future - Alterations

MACo Position: **SUPPORT WITH
AMENDMENTS**

To: Education, Energy, and the Environment
and Budget and Taxation Committees

Date: March 5, 2025

From: Sarah Sample and Kevin Kinnally

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS SB 852 WITH AMENDMENTS**. This bill seeks to adjust a number of components of the State's visionary education plan, the Blueprint for Maryland's Future (Blueprint). The provisions of the bill focus broadly on early education, teacher development, college and career readiness, and resource allocation.

The shifts proposed in SB 852 have the potential to come at a time when the Blueprint plan faces an environment dramatically unlike that envisioned during its initial forecasts. The pandemic, labor market, and cost-drivers have altered the underpinning of this landmark effort. County governments have been funding partners, making record-setting financial commitments over three years of the roll-out, with the vast majority of jurisdictions funding well over their local share of Blueprint costs. Even with these historic investments, education experts from across the state have highlighted challenges both operational and financial that could compromise the shared outcomes of the plan. SB 852 presents an opportunity to address some of those obvious and demonstrated challenges. While counties take no issue with the majority of the proposals in the bill, MACo offers some narrow changes to support greater local flexibility and continued accountability.

First, SB 852 seeks to repeal the career counseling programs established between the local board of education, local workforce development board, and the county's community college. Counties strongly agree with the Blueprint that local workforce development boards are best equipped to manage such programs, but one size often does not fit all. While the workforce development boards are the most obvious division to carry out this work, the counties and school boards should be able to exercise some discretion, if for any reason it appears that the current arrangements for these programs are not fulfilling the requirements. To this end, **MACo suggests an amendment to the bill allowing county governments, in agreement with the school board, to exercise the option to move these programs into either the county government or the local school system to carry out the charge with the specified funding.**

Second, there has been a substantial, and in some instances unnecessary, degree of burden that local school systems have endured due to the overly prescriptive nature of Blueprint funding.

Superintendents have made clear that the funding formula and strategy is another one-size-fits-all approach that lacks an understanding and appreciation for the diversity of communities across Maryland. School leaders across the jurisdictions have respectfully requested, and counties echo that request here, to give more flexibility on allocating and reporting funding in certain instances.

Specifically, an amendment to SB 852 that allows financial reporting to be aggregated at the school level rather than by Blueprint category would ease compliance significantly and maintain the integrity of the mandate that 75% of funding follow students to their schools.

Third, local school systems have put a great deal of effort into engaging and incentivizing high quality teachers to move to underperforming schools. The obstacles presented in these negotiations are very specific to the individual teachers being asked to make what, in many instances, is a substantial life change for them and their family. It can include changes in commuting, work environments, living situations, family schedules, and the like. Focusing state resources narrowly on national board certification stipends limits available resources to a singular incentive, leaving the school system to explore other avenues without access to corresponding resources. For this reason, **counties believe an amendment to the bill should require the State to explore alternative incentive strategies with accompanying state resources to aid local school systems struggling to encourage teacher movement.**

Fourth, while counties appreciate the willingness to bring the Blueprint into alignment with implementation realities, the expense to taxpayers is still overwhelming. The investments in education must continue to comply with the strictest transparency and accountability standards, especially as progress relates to the changes SB 852 demands. To this end, **counties respectfully request an amendment to the bill to require the Maryland State Department of Education to report annually on the effects of any changes to the Blueprint.**

Significant reforms, as those prescribed by the Blueprint, hold great promise but must be built to last. Course corrections in the face of significant obstacles will serve students, educators, and communities better in the long run. SB 852, with the reasonable changes outlined above, can ensure the reform plan will work for all students, teachers, and school leadership. Accordingly, MACo urges a **FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS** report for SB 852.