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Bill Number:	Senate Bill 852
Title:	Blueprint for Maryland's Future – Alterations
Committee:	Education, Energy, and the Environment
Hearing Date:	March 5, 2025
Position:	UNFAVORABLE

Employ Prince George's, Inc. (EPG) is the principal workforce development entity for the Prince George's County Government, and the staff, fiscal agent, and career services provider for the Prince George's County Workforce Development Board. Employ Prince George's is responsible for regulating policy development, operating the Prince George's County Public Workforce System, and administering all workforce activities related to compliance and workforce development services funded by the Prince George's County Government and the Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act (WIOA).

When the General Assembly passed the landmark Blueprint for Maryland's Future, it recognized that preparing students for career success required collaboration between county boards of education, community colleges, and local workforce development boards. As such, the Blueprint mandated that school systems partner with these entities to provide career counseling services and provided a per-pupil funding benchmark (\$62, adjusted annually for inflation) through Fiscal Year 2026 to support this critical initiative.

Unfortunately, school systems across the state—under guidance from the Public School Superintendents' Association of Maryland (PSSAM)—have willfully misinterpreted this funding mechanism as a temporary “pilot” program, despite no such language appearing in Maryland law or in guidance from the Accountability and Implementation Board (AIB). This mischaracterization has undermined the General Assembly's intent and jeopardized the success of the Career Counseling Program.

Prince George's County provides a glaring example of how school systems have resisted this legislative mandate. From the outset of Blueprint implementation, Prince George's County Public Schools (PGCPS) failed to prioritize Career Counseling under the Blueprint, delayed EPG's access to schools for over 12 months, and failed to make mandatory Blueprint payments that fund the salaries of career coaches and career counseling programs for PGCPS students. These actions ultimately required an AIB-appointed facilitator to intervene, assist EPG to enter local middle and high schools, and mandate that PGCPS make the required payments owed to EPG. These actions demonstrate a blatant disregard for both the law and students who rely on critical workforce development services.

Senate Bill 852 proposes to eliminate the Career Counseling Program entirely, just as its positive effects and success stories are beginning to emerge. Make no mistake, the Career Counseling Program

is one of the most innovative and visionary elements of the Blueprint, one which truly prepares our students for the economy of tomorrow. Beyond the negative effects on career outcomes for our students, this legislation would also result in hundreds of career counselors losing their jobs across Maryland. Most significantly, however, is the fact that this bill would essentially reward school administrators for their blatant disregard of the General Assembly's Blueprint mandate.

The idea that school systems alone are better suited to provide career counseling or adequately prepare students for today's workforce is fundamentally flawed. Workforce development boards play a unique and essential role in career readiness that school systems simply cannot replicate:

1. **Data-Driven Decision Making:** Workforce boards maintain extensive labor market information and industry data to align career counseling with real job opportunities and local career pathways. School systems do not have this expertise.
2. **Employer Connections:** Workforce boards have established relationships with local businesses, ensuring that students gain direct access to potential employers, mentors, and community leaders. School systems do not have these employer relationships and networks.
3. **Career Pathway Tracking:** Workforce boards track individuals beyond high school graduation, providing long-term career pathway support. School systems do not have the infrastructure or desire to do this.
4. **Job Placement and Hiring Events:** Workforce boards regularly host job fairs and hiring events that connect students to immediate employment opportunities. School systems lack the capacity to do so.

SB 852 effectively dismantles a program that has already provided invaluable career support to thousands of students across Maryland. We respectfully urge the committee to report unfavorably on Senate Bill 852 and ensure the Blueprint Career Counseling Program remains a stable, well-funded, and integral part of Maryland's workforce pipeline.