



SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS: Senate Bill 852
Senate Bill 852: Blueprint for Maryland's Future - Alterations
Position: Favorable with Amendments
Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
March 5, 2025

The Blueprint Coalition, a 30+ member organization representing hundreds of thousands of Marylanders and co-led by Strong Schools Maryland and the Maryland State Education Association, is dedicated to complete implementation and funding of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future. We submit this testimony in support of parts of Senate Bill 852 but recommend significant amendments due to concerns about key provisions.

We strongly support provisions in the bill that advance equity and strengthen educational opportunities. Expanding the definition of "Tier I child" for publicly funded prekindergarten (Page 13, Lines 14–27) will ensure children with disabilities and those from multilingual homes have greater access to early education. The study on the impact of National Board Certification (Page 16, Lines 18–30) is essential for understanding its role in improving teacher effectiveness and retention. Likewise, the required study on the adequacy of Maryland's special education funding (Page 17, Lines 1–26) is a necessary step to ensuring students with disabilities receive the support they need.

However, other provisions in the bill raise concerns about equity and implementation of the Blueprint:

- **Waiving Minimum School Funding for Smaller Schools (Page 4, Line 4):** The minimum funding requirement ensures that resources follow students. The Blueprint mandates that at least 75% of funding must follow students, with no upper limit on additional resources a school can receive. While schools with fewer than 350 students may appear overfunded, this waiver does not address that issue. Instead, it risks undermining funding equity for high-need student populations.
- **Aggregating Provisions of 5-234 at the School Level (Page 4, Lines 5–6):** Aggregation would make it significantly harder to track whether Blueprint funds are being used as intended. The Blueprint's categorical funding structure ensures resources are targeted to specific priorities. Aggregating expenditures at the school level would obscure whether funds are actually being spent on essential initiatives or being redirected elsewhere. Breaking down expenditures by category is not just a bureaucratic exercise; it is a critical safeguard to ensure funding supports students as intended. Simply showing that money reaches a school does not guarantee it is being spent on the right supports for the students who need them most.
- **Post-CCR Pathway Eligibility and FARMs Limitations (Page 14, Line 3 – Page 15, Line 13):** The bill allows county boards to set income eligibility limits for post-college and career readiness (CCR) pathway costs, except for students eligible for Free and Reduced-Price Meals (FARMs). This is particularly concerning because FARMs eligibility has long been criticized as an incomplete measure of financial need. Many families who do not qualify for FARMs still struggle with school-related costs, including lunch. Limiting financial support for CCR pathways based solely on FARMs could create additional barriers for students who need these opportunities to succeed. We

urge the General Assembly to adopt a more comprehensive approach to eligibility that accounts for regional cost-of-living variations and recognizes that FARMs alone does not capture the full picture of economic hardship.

- **Limiting AIB Authority Over Collective Bargaining (Page 4, Lines 19–24):** This change is unnecessary because the AIB already has no authority over collective bargaining beyond career ladder provisions. It does not alter existing power dynamics and serves no clear purpose in improving Blueprint implementation.

We urge the Committee to amend Senate Bill 852 to remove these provisions while retaining the essential studies and expanded prekindergarten eligibility. The Blueprint Coalition believes these changes will ensure the bill remains aligned with the goal of providing equitable, high-quality education to all Maryland students. **For these reasons, the Blueprint Coalition respectfully requests a favorable report only with major amendments to Senate Bill 852.**

Please contact Riya Gupta at riya@strongschoolsmaryland.org for additional questions.