



Testimony in Support of SB451

Adult Education – High School Diploma by Examination – Requirements and Study

Ways and Means

January 29, 2025

Dear Honorable Chair Atterbeary and Members of the Committee,

MAREE is in full support of **Senate Bill 451 – Adult Education – High School Diploma by Examination – Requirements and Study**. The Maryland Alliance for Racial Equity in Education (MAREE), a coalition of education advocacy, civil rights, and community-based organizations committed to eliminating racial disparities in Maryland’s education system.

Senate Bill 451 advocates for the Maryland Department of Labor to allow an individual to take all components of the GED or General Educational Development Test in either English or Spanish depending on individual preference. Furthermore, the bill advocates that the Maryland Department of Labor study the feasibility and cost of offering the test in additional languages and to report its findings and recommendations to certain committees of the General Assembly on or before December 1, 2026.

This proposal would once again align Maryland with the equitable practices of virtually all other states. Prior to 2014, the GED Test was available in both English and Spanish. However, when the test was updated that year, Maryland discontinued offering the test in Spanish. This shift in language access has created significant professional barriers to adult immigrants seeking to reach their full professional potential and make the most impactful contributions to Maryland’s workforce. Furthermore, the current lack of language access for the GED Test in Maryland is negatively impacting the professional potential of our K-12 youth. Each year there is an ever-increasing influx of immigrant students into our public education system. Many are joining our communities in their later high school years with English fluency creating a significant barrier to timely high school graduation, post-secondary enrollment, and employment in critical state industries.

As demonstrated by other state’s implementation of the nationally recognized Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training Project (I-BEST), many immigrant students do not have time to develop linguistic, academic, and professional skills in a linear manner. This is particularly true of our state’s low-income residents. Professional, familial, and economic time constraints require that they instead develop multiple skills simultaneously to meet their full professional potential in a timely manner. The current policy of offering the GED Test exclusively

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in English means that many must first achieve English fluency and then pursue academic and finally professional goals. This is an unrealistic timeline for many individuals and creates further strains on the Maryland economy at a time when there are workforce gaps in critical industries such as teaching and healthcare. Providing the GED Test in Spanish is an equitable solution that allows Marylanders to develop multiple skills in a more efficient manner. It will remove a significant barrier to those who seek access to the careers that best match their talents and most impactfully contribute towards a thriving Maryland economy.

A Spanish GED provides significant benefits for individuals whose primary language is Spanish, allowing them to demonstrate their knowledge and abilities without being hindered by a language barrier, leading to better test performance, increased access to education and employment opportunities, and a greater sense of empowerment by taking the test in their native tongue; essentially enabling them to showcase their true capabilities without the obstacle of translating the test content.

MAREE respectfully asks the committee to consider the numerous advantages of SB 451 and submit a favorable report.

peace and truth,

The Maryland Alliance for Racial Equity in Education (MAREE)