

**March 3, 2025**

**To:** The Honorable Members of the Maryland State Senate

**Re:** Support for SB 852

Dear Senators,

I am writing to express my strong support for Senate Bill 852 (SB 852), which proposes essential modifications to the Blueprint for Maryland's Future. These adjustments originate from the collective expertise of twenty-four Maryland Superintendents, who have identified critical areas requiring improvement, course correction, or intervention to prevent potential challenges threatening the outcomes of the Blueprint. (See: PSSAM Legislative and Policy Recommendations.)

One key issue that must be addressed is the **Career Counseling Pilot with Local Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs)**. It is important to clarify, the proposed amendment does not eliminate career counseling altogether; rather, it ends the restrictive pilot phase, granting school districts the flexibility to design and implement career counseling programs that best meet the needs of their students.

**HCPS supports allowing Local Education Agencies (LEAs) the immediate discretion to discontinue the pilot** partnerships with workforce investment boards a year ahead of the pilot's expiration. The current pilot's implementation has been inconsistent and problematic, creating unnecessary barriers rather than enhancing student career readiness. Where career counseling programs are working well, they are largely led by district-hired and trained staff, reinforcing the need for direct district control.

*Our position in summary is as follows:*

- **HCPS Leads in Career Readiness** – HCPS has been a state leader in apprenticeships, career credential attainment, and fostering a career-driven mindset. Despite this success, the career counseling pilot prohibits funds from being used to support apprenticeships, restricting the district's ability to further capitalize on proven innovation.
- **Current Pilot has Ineffective Use of Funds** – A significant portion of funding is absorbed by WIB overhead costs (14% in Harford County), covering office space, network expenses, and non-career coaching salaries instead of directly benefiting students.
- **Current Pilot has Bureaucratic Inefficiencies**– Excessive red tape requires legal reviews from multiple entities for contracts, delaying progress. The WIB has never been able to fully staff required positions, and onboarding career coaches takes months, limiting student access to support.
- **The Career Counseling Pilot Hinders Progress** – Rigid requirements and bureaucratic obstacles prevent HCPS from effectively connecting students to real career opportunities, making career counseling an abstract process rather than a bridge to hands-on experiences.
- **Legislative Action is Needed** – SB 852 and HB 1245 would allow districts to directly manage career counseling, maximize the impact of funds, and streamline processes, ensuring that resources are used effectively to support students in achieving meaningful career and college experiences.

*The full details of our position are as follows:*

**HCPS has been a state leader in apprenticeships, career credential attainment, and fostering a career-driven mindset among students.** The very areas where we excel receive no career counseling funds, and we are explicitly prohibited from using these funds to support apprenticeships. Yet, despite these constraints, as of last week, 276 students are actively participating in apprenticeships—an achievement driven entirely by our ability to innovate and adapt. Our success comes from flexibility and forward-thinking approaches, both of which are undermined by the rigid and restrictive requirements of the career counseling pilot. Rather than supporting progress, these limitations often serve as obstacles, making it harder, not easier, to connect students with meaningful career opportunities.

It is baffling that career counseling funds cannot be used to directly support students in accessing real career experiences. The idea that there must be a rigid separation between career counseling and actually connecting students to tangible opportunities is entirely counterproductive. There is no iron curtain between guiding students and giving them the hands-on experiences that will shape their futures. Career counseling should not be an abstract exercise. It should be a bridge that leads students directly to meaningful career pathways. **When we focus on outcomes instead of rigid processes, we see real progress.** However, when we are required to follow inefficient, bureaucratic structures, results suffer, and resources are wasted.

The HCPS experience with the career counseling pilot is significant:

- **Ineffective Use of Funds**—a significant portion of funding is absorbed by WIB overhead costs rather than benefiting students. In Harford County, we are charged a total of 14% of funds diverted to overhead, while HCPS uses 0% of funds for such expenses.
  - › \$49,000 for a share of WIB office space.
  - › \$34,000 for a portion of their network costs.
  - › \$238,000 for *non-career coaching* office staff salaries.
- **Excessive bureaucracy**—three different lawyers must review every contract before it can move forward. The excessive time spent negotiating and overcoming administrative obstacles detracts from other educational priorities.
- **Persistent staffing shortages**—our WIB has never been able to fully staff the positions required for the pilot. It takes months for our partner to onboard a career coach and place them in schools.

HCPS has made extensive efforts to work within the pilot's framework, but the structural issues remain. Unfilled positions, bureaucratic delays, and a lack of authority to directly manage career counseling have negatively impacted students' access to essential resources.

If given the opportunity to suspend the career counseling pilot, to innovate, and to achieve the outcomes that the Blueprint aspires to, we would use the career counseling funds to:

- Truly improve the connections to students for individualized career pathways, strengthen the efficient use of expertise of our business partners (including our WIB).
- Connect students to the opportunities for career or college experiences by making the process seamless and integrated into the student experience.

**With the flexibility to design a system that prioritizes outcomes over rigid processes, we would create a dynamic, student-centered approach that ensures every learner has access to the guidance, experiences, and resources necessary to confidently step into their future.**

*We respectfully urge legislators to support SB 852 and HB 1245, which will empower districts to:*

- ✓ **Directly manage career counseling**, tailoring programs to local structures and needs and workforce demands.
- ✓ **Maximize the impact of funds**, ensuring resources benefit students rather than administrative overhead. Increasing the return on investment is a win for all.
- ✓ **Streamline processes**, reducing inefficiencies and bureaucratic hurdles.

HCPS remains committed to partnering with our local workforce board in ways that leverage their strengths—particularly their expertise in workforce development. However, we also ask for the opportunity to build on our own successes, as evidenced by our leadership in career readiness programs.

Please support SB 852 to allow districts flexibility to lead the future of career counseling and ensure the best outcomes for Maryland students.

Thank you,



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