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## **BLUEPRINT FOR MARYLAND'S FUTURE**

**BILL:** House Bill 772

**TITLE:** Education - Career Counseling Program for Middle and High School Students - Alterations

**SPONSOR:** Delegate Roberson

**DATE:** February 27, 2025

**COMMITTEE:** Ways and Means

**POSITION:** Information

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The Accountability and Implementation Board for the Blueprint for Maryland's Future (AIB) submits this **letter of information** for **House Bill 772 - Education - Career Counseling Program for Middle and High School Students - Alterations**.

House Bill 772 would maintain the funding mechanism for the Career Counseling Program for Middle and High School Students, established in Chapter 36 of 2021, indefinitely, beyond the current termination date of Fiscal Year 2026. The legislation would also require the local workforce development board, in collaboration with the county board of education, to report to the AIB beyond the current termination date of Fiscal Year 2026, on the use of the funds and their impact on providing career counseling to students.

The Career Counseling Program is a vital component of the Blueprint's Pillar 3, College and Career Readiness, efforts which strive to ensure that all students receive a world-class education that prepares them for future success in college, careers, and life. Through Career Counseling, students identify their career interests and goals, learn about a wide variety of career pathways available, and develop a personalized plan for accessing the high school courses and postsecondary options to earn the necessary certifications, degrees, and experiences that open the door to high-growth jobs and careers.

### **Background**

The Blueprint law (Education Article, Section 7-127) establishes a Career Counseling Program for Middle and High School students, the purpose of which is to provide each middle and high school student with individualized career counseling services. Each local board of education is required to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding with the Local Workforce Development Board (LWDB), the community college that serves the County and, if appropriate, an American Job Center. The counseling provided to each student under the MOU will help them choose one or more career readiness pathways.

Further, the law (Education Article, Section 5-213) establishes the requirement that each county board of education distribute to their Local Workforce Development Board (LWDB) \$62 multiplied by the enrollment count in Fiscal Year 2024, and for each of fiscal years 2025 and 2026, the prior year's amount increased by the inflation adjustment. The CTE Committee is required to conduct an evaluation of the MOUs to identify and disseminate best practices. The AIB's Blueprint Comprehensive Plan set December 1, 2025 as the deadline for the evaluation so that the findings would be available for consideration during the 2026 session in determining next steps.

While the requirement to distribute the per pupil amount to LWDBs currently terminates after fiscal year 2026, the Career Counseling Program is permanent. The Local Education Agencies (LEAs) will continue to receive funds through the Foundation Program, and the three parties (LWDBs, LEAs, and community colleges) will still be required to have an MOU, which continues to govern how the funds are used.

## **Progress Made**

The 2023-2024 school year was the first year of this new program. In consultation with our partners at MSDE and the CTE Committee, in 2023, the AIB provided technical assistance to LWDBs, LEAs, and community colleges to share the intent of the program, provide resources and guidance, and to initiate collaborations. The main features emphasized in all technical assistance sessions include that the intent of the program is to provide individualized career counseling to *every* Maryland middle and high school student, to allow each of the three organizations to bring their expertise to this collaboration to provide students with timely, relevant information about jobs and careers, and to help funnel students into in-demand jobs needed in the Maryland workforce.

In year one of the program, school year 2023-2024, the most urgent priorities were to establish local partnerships and develop an agreed upon, approvable MOU (these were reviewed by AIB/MSDE/CTE Committee to confirm they met requirements and conformed with provided guidance). While the majority of our counties were able to hire career counselors/coaches and program staff by spring 2024, it was challenging to stand up the full program in year one. As such, many counties had substantial carry-over funding from year one. It became apparent that flexibility was needed in the funding model. While the LEAs are required to distribute career counseling funds to the LWDB, some of the LWDBs were not in a position to take the lead in hiring coaching staff at the scope required by the program. In these situations, and others, the MOU partners agreed that the LEA would hire program staff.

The MOU agreements and budget negotiations continue to be challenging for some counties in year two, school year 2024-2025. The AIB has supported, through a strategic facilitator and AIB staff, eight (8) counties to date this year (and anticipates supporting 3-6 more) with targeted technical assistance to navigate the challenges of this work. Ensuring that the LWDBs and community colleges are able to share their expertise and resources with students remains a priority.

With complete or almost complete staffing in place in year two, the focus is now on the programming, scope and sequence, scheduling, and providing individualized career exploration activities and experiences to all students. We have heard many success stories from program leaders, career counselors, and students themselves about how impactful career counselors are for students. We've heard that interest inventories used by career counselors have helped students find fields of interest they didn't know existed and apprenticeship opportunities. Practical support such as developing resumes and cover letters and preparing for interviews have assisted students. We are also aware of ways that career counseling has been able to increase access to experiences and opportunities for students (sometimes through events, or transportation).

## **Considerations**

A consistent challenge for all partners is understanding the future of the Career Counseling Program. Specifically, the three year nature of the funding has caused concern about planning and coordinating the program past next year. Codifying the funding structure as permanent could ease this concern, both by ensuring the funding and establishing the roles. The flexibility to allow any partner to hire career coaches has been very helpful.

The CTE Committee's evaluation of the LEA/LWDB/Community College partnerships and MOUs is due December 1, 2025. Their findings and identification of best practices could help to inform the General Assembly prior to the termination of the per pupil funding distribution at the end of fiscal year 2026.

The AIB hopes that this information is useful as you consider this legislation. If you have any questions or would like to discuss this further, please contact Joy Schaefer, Government Relations Director at [joy.schaefer@maryland.gov](mailto:joy.schaefer@maryland.gov) or (410) 991-7326.