

SB0324 - MHEC & MSDE - Support - 4.7.26.docx.pdf

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STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Carey M. Wright, Ed.D., State Superintendent of Schools

HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION

Elena Quiroz-Livanis, Interim Secretary of Higher Education

TO: House Committee on Appropriations

BILL: SB0324- Higher Education – Public Senior Higher Education Institutions-Direct Admissions

DATE: April 7, 2026

POSITION: Support

The Maryland State Board of Education (State Board), State Department of Education (MSDE) and the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) extend their support for SB0324, which establishes a direct admissions program connecting College and Career Readiness (CCR) to postsecondary access. The bill establishes a process to set up a statewide direct admission program beginning in the 2028-2029 academic year that allows eligible Maryland high school students who meet the established criteria to receive conditional offers of admission to participating higher education institutions.

MSDE and MHEC also support the committee amendments, which strengthen the bill by making participation optional, defining eligibility through a memorandum of understanding and the development of a “unified admissions standard”, and allowing time for the required feasibility study prior to implementation. These modifications improve the bill’s practicality and ensure that programmatic, technical, legal, and operational factors are carefully considered.

MSDE and MHEC believe this reimagined approach can open doors to college for more Maryland students by proactively identifying those who have demonstrated readiness and connecting them to opportunities. This effort can help reduce longstanding disparities in access, particularly for students from underserved communities.

MSDE and MHEC are fully committed to executing the required feasibility study and delivering actionable, data-driven recommendations. To ensure success, the agencies envision a highly scalable approach that aligns with the state's fiscal capacity. A baseline investment will allow us to establish a strong foundational policy framework and establish the essential unified admissions standard. However, with robust structural funding, the agencies are prepared to engineer a fully operational, automated, and student-centered direct admissions technological platform. Ultimately, the scope and sophistication of the 2028–2029 rollout can be carefully calibrated to match the General Assembly's investment in this initiative.

MHEC, the State Board, and MSDE look forward to collaborating with the sponsor, legislative committees, and participating public senior higher education institutions to implement the direct admission program. We believe in the bill’s core vision of a student-centered, equitable direct admissions pathway while ensuring the program is implemented thoughtfully, sustainably, and in a manner that aligns K-12 and postsecondary education systems in service of Maryland learners.

Please contact Laurel Cratsley, Interim Executive Director of Government Affairs, at laurel.cratsley@maryland.gov, or Meghan Music, Executive Director of External and Legislative Affairs, at meghan.music2@maryland.gov, if you would like any additional information.

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