

SUPPORT: Senate Bill 289
Concentration of Poverty School Grant Program
Personnel and Per Pupil Grants – Eligible Uses
Senate Budget & Taxation Committee
February 3, 2026

My name is Robert Miller and I am writing **in strong support of Senate Bill 289**, Concentration of Poverty School Grant Program - Personnel and Per Pupil Grants - Eligible Uses.

I am a retired band director from the Howard County Public School System, and about the time of my retirement ten years ago I learned that the great majority of students in the Baltimore City Public Schools do not have the opportunity to participate in curricular instrumental music programs at their schools, even though this opportunity exists everywhere else in Maryland. That led me to get involved with some advocacy committees trying to increase access to arts education in Baltimore City and Maryland, with the hope of allowing those students to be able to access the tremendous potential benefits that quality arts education opportunities can provide. These can include enabling students to discover and develop artistic interests and skills, cultivate aesthetic appreciation and creativity, seek scholarships, pursue careers in arts-related and other fields, as well as improve academic achievement, self-esteem, resilience/self-discipline, and the ability to work with others, while promoting a sense of belonging, student connection and contribution to school and community, a healthy school climate, and positive parent and family engagement.

The Blueprint for Maryland's Future admirably intends to transform Maryland's public education system into a world-class system. To help us get there, we must be diligent to ensure that all **critical and core content areas**, including the arts, are upheld and **supported through this transformation**. Particularly for schools that serve concentrations of students experiencing poverty, communities should have the opportunity to invest supportive funding into strategies they know to be best for their students. HB352/SB289 furthers the goals of the Blueprint in delivering this world class education by ensuring **uninterrupted allowable usage of funds** established at the outset of the Blueprint's implementation.

Currently, the Blueprint for Maryland's Future states that **concentration of poverty funds from the personnel and per pupil grant** may be used through fiscal year 2027 to provide the programs required under COMAR 13A.04 ([2022, HB1450, §5-223\(c\)\(9\), Pg. 3](#), repeated in [2025, HB504§5-223\(c\)\(9\)](#), Pg. 16). These programs form the core subject areas of a public school students' education: everything from science, mathematics, and fine arts to English language arts, social studies, and physical education.

After fiscal year 2027, the eligibility of this use of the concentration of poverty funds from the personnel and per pupil grant will expire. HB352/SB289 seeks to **eliminate the sunset timeline** in the law to ensure that arts education, among other subject areas, continues to be an allowable use of funding in perpetuity to support the world-class education every student deserves.

Arts education is critical and transformative for our students. As mentioned earlier, the arts offer unique ways to connect and engage with the world around us, which often leads to a strengthened sense of belonging. The arts support social-emotional skill development that helps children thrive in all aspects of their lives. Learning an arts discipline **boosts neuroplasticity, producing long-lasting impacts on the brain.** The arts are also essential for college and career readiness, strengthening student's problem solving and critical thinking skills applicable to any path, including a collegiate or professional pathway in the arts.

Sunsetting this allowable use of funding would make it very difficult to continue supporting arts education at the levels that are currently provided. To continue the investment in our children that we know is needed and possible, we believe that school communities should **continue having the option** to invest their CPG funding in the arts in response to community need.

I am very concerned that sunseting would negatively impact the progress that has been made, and prevent future progress from being made, regarding student access to arts education and a well-rounded education.

With the passage of HB352/SB289, Maryland can maintain the Blueprint's foundation of a well-rounded education so that we can enhance it even further. Therefore, I urge the committee to provide a **favorable report on SB 289.** Thank you for investing in the future of our state: Maryland's public school students.

Sincerely,



Robert W. Miller

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