FAVORABLE_ Senate Bill 289.pdf
Uploaded by: Aaron Klaus
Position: FAV

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 Aaron Klaus and I am writing **in strong support of Senate Bill 289**, Concentration of Poverty School Grant Program - Personnel and Per Pupil Grants - Eligible Uses. As a music teacher in MCPS and a product of Maryland school arts programs, this bill is very important to me.

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.

Given my profession and my background, I can attest that arts education is critical and transformative for our students. 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.

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,

Aaron Klaus

BYAAC Testimonial TEMPLATE - FAVORABLE_ Senate Bi

Uploaded by: Jamaira Johnson

Position: FAV

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 Jamaira Johnson, a Baltimore City Public Schools student at Reach! Partnership High School and I am writing **in strong support of Senate Bill 289**, Concentration of Poverty School Grant Program - Personnel and Per Pupil Grants - Eligible Uses.

Equitable Arts education matters because It helps students feel comfortable with who they really are. According to data from IPaintMyMind, a Public Charity / Nonprofit Organization, students who take art classes excel more in school, other subjects, and even after they graduate high school. 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) for core subject areas, including the fine arts. By supporting SB289 and eliminating the sunset timeline in law, you will help ensure that arts education, along with other core subjects, continues to be an allowable use of funding to help ensure students use art to their strongest ability.

Taking art classes such as Theatre , not only motivated me to go to school, but it helped me discover who I am and why it matters. My Theatre teacher has not only been a wonderful teacher but they guided me through my high school experience and helped me realize how important arts education truly is. He gave me the resources I needed to succeed not only in the class but outside of it. Such as helping me get through my home situations when I didn't have anywhere to go, or when I was in an unhealthy relationship; He taught me the importance of knowing how important it is to know who you are and what to allow yourself to settle for. If he hadn't been a shoulder for me to lean on I wouldn't have mentally made it through my senior year in high school. That's why it matters to know who you are. Because when you know who you are, you stop letting the world tell you who to be. That's why it's important to fund programs such as theatre because it not only uplifts their want to widen their horizon but helps them find who they are.

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Allowing schools to use Concentration of Poverty Grant funds to provide arts classes in schools not only provides structure and identity for students, but gives them a chance at a better life after high school. It also gives them hope and relief that they can be their own person and not who society “told” them to be.

Art not only provides students with the comfort of knowing it's okay to be who you are, but it also helps them realize that you express that through art.

Pablo Picasso once said “Every child is an artist. The problem is how to remain an artist once he grows up” This quote emphasizes the importance of letting a child grow into art rather than restricting it from them, because it's almost like restricting a child from their identity.

By supporting this bill and eliminating the sunset language, school communities will **continue having the option** to invest their CPG funding in the arts in response to community need.
I urge the committee to provide a **favorable report on SB 289.**

Sincerely,

Jamaira Johnson
Baltimore City Public Schools student at Reach! Partnership High School

FAVORABLE_ Senate Bill 289 (3).pdf
Uploaded by: Kellie Marz Mele
Position: FAV

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 Kellie Marz Mele, and I submit this testimony in support of **Senate Bill 289, Concentration of Poverty School Grant Program – Personnel and Per Pupil Grants – Eligible Uses**.

I am the Director of Education at the Washington County Museum of Fine Arts, where I work in partnership with Washington County Public Schools to provide arts-based learning opportunities connected to extended learning time and afterschool programming. These partnerships are designed to complement classroom instruction and align with required content areas, including fine arts as outlined in COMAR 13A.04.

In Washington County, WCPS afterschool students visit the museum on some early dismissal days as part of structured arts learning experiences. During these visits, students participate in facilitated gallery discussions and activities that include writing and music responses to works of art. These sessions are planned in coordination with school staff and are structured to fit within early dismissal schedules.

In other instances, teaching artists from the museum travel into schools to lead afterschool programs. These programs bring art materials and artist-led lessons directly into school buildings, allowing students to participate in hands-on learning within existing afterschool structures. Together, these models allow schools and community partners to adapt arts programming to local needs, schedules, and capacity.

Under current Blueprint provisions, concentration of poverty funds from the personnel and per pupil grant may be used through fiscal year 2027 to support programs required under COMAR 13A.04, including fine arts. After fiscal year 2027, this allowable use will expire. Senate Bill 289 removes this sunset, maintaining fine arts as an allowable use of funding alongside other core subject areas.

In Washington County, Blueprint-supported partnerships between public schools and the Washington County Museum of Fine Arts were identified as an example of Pillar 4 implementation in the May 2024 Blueprint Implementation Report. This identification reflects how concentration of poverty funds may be used to support school–community partnerships within the Blueprint framework.

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Allowing the current funding provision to expire would limit the ability of school systems and community partners to continue programs that are already operating within the Blueprint structure. Maintaining allowable use of Concentration of Poverty Grant funding for fine arts preserves local flexibility in designing extended learning opportunities.

For these reasons, I respectfully request a favorable report on **Senate Bill 289**.

Sincerely,

Kellie Marz Mele, M.Ed.
Doctoral Candidate, Organizational Leadership
Director of Education
Washington County Museum of Fine Arts

SB289 Support (Written).pdf
Uploaded by: Kenzie Funk
Position: FAV

Testimony in SUPPORT of
Senate Bill 289: Concentration of Poverty School Grant Program - Personnel and Per Pupil Grants - Eligible Uses
Budget and Taxation Committee
Position: Favorable
February 3, 2026

Strong Schools Maryland is a statewide network of parents, educators, and advocates committed to the full funding and faithful implementation of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future. The Blueprint envisions a public education system where all students can feel safe and supported to learn and thrive in their school community. As a result, **Strong Schools Maryland urges a favorable report on Senate Bill 289 - Concentration of Poverty School Grant Program - Personnel and Per Pupil Grants - Eligible.**

The Blueprint for Maryland's Future aims to transform Maryland's public education system into a world class model, with community schools playing a central role in that vision. The community school model approach directs resources to meet needs identified through the school's Need Assessment, in order to recognize that every community is different and therefore has unique needs. Because those needs vary, not just between communities but within communities, flexibility is essential to this work. Effectively allocating resources, providing social and emotional support, and meeting students and families where they are requires the ability to respond to each school community's unique circumstance.

Currently, the Blueprint for Maryland's Future states that concentration of poverty funds from the personnel and per pupil grants 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. This regulation was purposeful as it allows for that spending flexibility and recognizes that meeting students' needs requires the ability to invest across a wide range of academic programming. SB 289 protects that principle by eliminating the looming sunset that would unnecessarily restrict how concentration of poverty grant funds may be used.

The sunsetting of this flexibility would force schools into artificial tradeoffs that do not reflect student needs and or our vision for community schools as schools could lose the ability to sustain staffing, programming, and instructional supports that have already been built using these funds. Maryland will only achieve a world-class school system if we sustain and bolster the tools that meet students where they are. Senate Bill 289 affirms trust in community schools, respects local expertise, and keeps the Blueprint aligned with its original promise.

For these reasons, Strong Schools Maryland urges the committee to provide a favorable report on SB 289.

For more information, contact Kenzie Funk at kenzie@strongschoolsmaryland.org

ST - FAVORABLE_ Senate Bill 289 KWC.pdf
Uploaded by: Kristen Callisto
Position: FAV

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 Kristen Wong Callisto, Ed.L.D., CEFL, Story Tapestries board vice-chair and I am writing **in strong support of Senate Bill 289**, Concentration of Poverty School Grant Program - Personnel and Per Pupil Grants - Eligible Uses.

My career began as a special education teacher in a high-poverty neighborhood on Oahu, eventually spanning every level from preschool to graduate school across five states. I've also led system-wide policy as the Director of School Improvement for Washington State. These twenty years in K-12 education have taught me one vital truth: a 21st-century education must be well-rounded, rigorous, and relevant to succeed in holding the proper market share on engagement of today's students against the competition from education disrupters like YouTube, TikTok, and AI.

The arts are not a luxury; they are an essential instructional tool because they integrate core instructional content by authorizing a learner to personalize and create meaning through creativity. Furthermore, as schools grapple with declining attendance and increased mental health needs, a student may not be engaged by a math lesson, but may want to come to school for their fine arts class where they will nevertheless still learn principles of math like geometry. A student may not be able to articulate their feelings to even the school counselor but perhaps they can express it through connecting with a character in their drama class or feel a sense of belonging just the camaraderie of standing shoulder to shoulder with their peers in their choir.

Yet, the arts remain a primary site of inequity in education. When districts are in greater resource constraints than usual, arts are among the first instructional areas to be treated as "elective" and budgets are reduced or cut. What many schools fail to realize is that cutting arts education most impacts students in under-resourced communities who lack the private means to fill that gap. It is precisely these communities that need it the most:

As one of our partners shared with us: "The impact of Story Tapestries on our students and families was like introducing water to a desert - growth and blooming happened in beautiful and necessary ways." (Lynn Rose, Community Engagement Manager, Montgomery County Coalition for the Homeless)

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

SUPPORT: Senate Bill 289
Concentration of Poverty School Grant Program
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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.

Having implemented education policy across multiple states, I know that success depends on clarity and specificity that often surprises stakeholders. Without specific mandates, the original intent of a policy can easily be lost between the statehouse and the classroom or in more unfortunate situations be seen as permission to stop or reduce commitment by those looking for the easiest path to compliance and execution. This bill provides the vital direction that school boards and district leaders need to ensure arts education remains a permanent, protected priority for every student.

Arts education is critical and transformative for our students. 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.

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With the passage of HB352/SB289, Maryland can maintain the Blu eprint'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,

Kristen Wong Callisto, Ed.L.D. CEFL
Story Tapestries Board Vice-Chair

SB 289 - State Board & MSDE - Support.docx.pdf
Uploaded by: Laurel Cratsley
Position: FAV

Maryland
STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Carey M. Wright, Ed.D.
State Superintendent of Schools
Joshua L. Michael, Ph.D.
President, State Board of Education

TO: Budget and Taxation Committee

BILL: Senate Bill (SB) 289 – Concentration of Poverty School Grant Program – Personnel and Per Pupil Grants – Eligible Uses

DATE: February 3, 2026

POSITION: Support

The Maryland State Board of Education (State Board) and the State Department of Education (MSDE) provide this Letter of Support regarding **Senate Bill (SB) 289 – *Concentration of Poverty School Grant Program – Personnel and Per Pupil Grants – Eligible Uses.***

Senate Bill 289 removes the Fiscal Year 2027 sunset date for an existing allowable expenditure of Concentration of Poverty Funds. Under current law, if a community school receives the Concentration of Poverty Personnel and/or Per Pupil grant (Education Article § 5-223), and the amount of grant funding exceeds the costs to employ the staffing positions required by the program, then the excess funds may be used to support programs required under COMAR Title 13A, Subtitle 04, including 13A.04.16.01, *Programs for Fine Arts*.

The State Board and MSDE support continuing this option and removing the sunset date for Maryland's Community Schools. All Community Schools complete a comprehensive needs assessment and implementation plan that guides the school in deploying Concentration of Poverty funding. Continuing this flexibility ensures that local education agencies retain the ability to respond to identified student and community needs, including sustaining access to high-quality arts and world language programming that supports a well-rounded education.

MSDE respectfully requests consideration of these comments as **SB289** is discussed and deliberated. For further information, please contact Laurel Cratsley at 443-571-5461, or laurel.cratsley@maryland.gov.

Senate Bill 289 Testimonial - Marley Walter.pdf

Uploaded by: Marley Walter

Position: FAV

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 Marley Walter, I am a Baltimore City Public Schools student at Baltimore City College, and I am writing **in strong support of Senate Bill 289**, Concentration of Poverty School Grant Program - Personnel and Per Pupil Grants - Eligible Uses.

When I was younger, I moved a lot, between Baltimore City, Baltimore County, and Florida. I quickly realized gaps in the education I was receiving. Every time I moved back to Baltimore, I was ahead of the curriculum; I received fewer resources in art classes, and I even had art, science, math, and English classes that were lacking curriculum, goals, or solid units. Access to funding for education matters to me because students, regardless of where they reside, deserve to be prioritized both for educational and artistic opportunities.

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) for core subject areas, including the fine arts. By supporting SB289 and eliminating the sunset timeline in law, you will help ensure that arts education, along with other core subjects, continues to be an allowable use of funding to support world-class education that every student, both in and out of Baltimore City Public Schools, deserves to have access to and experience.

Let's be honest, school can be tough for a lot of kids. There's this one-size-fits-all idea of intelligence that the majority of us have come to agree upon, but that perspective is alienating at best. Sometimes art can be a break for kids who have internalized failures, and sometimes that break leads to massive forms of success, both in small, revolutionary forms and large ones too. I'd like to talk about what we all know about school first: not everyone is good at every subject, but the arts bring successful education to life. Recent research in studies, including ones published in the NPJ Science of Learning, finds correlations between art classes and rising GPAs, especially in Literature and Math classes.

The arts are not only a way to sustain ourselves in school, but in life as marginalized folk. Art inspires us to speak out, whether that comes to you verbally or not. For example, the Harlem Renaissance was one of the first periods of black people resisting constrictions placed on them through the embodiment of art. Although it may seem long ago, the value, reality, and words weigh just as heavily today. Zora Neale Hurston said that "If you are silent about your pain, they will kill you and say that you enjoyed it." Irrefutably true in the political climate. Right

SUPPORT: Senate Bill 289
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now, we live in a world of rising fascism, one that is defunding public education, banning our books, censoring our work, and removing our activism. Art is the way we write these perspectives back in. A way to prevent society from shaving off the forms of resistance that have transpired from uncensored work, or from people being adamant about speaking up. As students, as marginalized folks, there are few opportunities to speak up generally, with power and without harm. However, sharing art is one of the few outlets that can make us feel empowered or speak up in a way that is tangible and comfortable to us. Inspiring students to act and pursue creative solutions to existing problems should be a priority, your priority.

By supporting this bill and eliminating the sunset language, school communities will **continue having the option** to invest their CPG funding in the arts in response to community need.
I urge the committee to provide a **favorable report on SB 289.** Thank you for continuing to invest in the livelihoods and educations of Maryland's public school students!
Sincerely,

Marley Walter
Baltimore City Public Schools student at Baltimore City College.

Ziggy's BYAAC Testimonial - FAVORABLE_ Senate Bill

Uploaded by: Naia Chase

Position: FAV

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 Naia Chase, a Baltimore City Public Schools student at Baltimore Design School 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 an eleventh grader pursuing graphic design at my school. I've always had an interest in art since it played a big role in my life ever since I was a child. Having access to an art class since pre-school really opened my eyes to more interesting and creative ways to learn in other subjects including ways to remember certain things in my classes.

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. Specifically schools that serve concentrations of students experiencing poverty, communities should have the opportunity to help fund things that will help their students. SB289 further the goals of the Blueprint for Maryland's Education 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) for core subject areas, including the fine arts. By supporting SB289 and eliminating the sunset timeline in law, you will help ensure that arts education, along with other core subjects, continues to be an allowable use of funding to help support the class education that every student deserves to have.

Arts education is important and inspiring for our students. The arts offer unique ways to connect and engage with the world around us, which often leads to a strong sense of belonging and care. The arts support social-emotional skill development that helps the children thrive in all aspects of their lives. Learning that arts discipline boosts neuroplasticity, producing long-lasting impacts on the brain. The arts are also very essential for college and career readiness or even success, strengthening a student's knowledge for problem solving and critical thinking skills that are applicable to any path, including collegiate or professional pathways 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 this investment in our children and students that we know is needed, we believe that school communities should

continue having the option to invest their CPG funding in the arts in response to community need.

By supporting this bill and eliminating the sunset language, school communities will **continue having the option** to invest their CPG funding in the arts in response to community need.
I urge the committee to provide a **favorable report on SB 289.** Thank you kindly for investing in the future of Maryland's public school students. With this we'll help make the future of our state bright.

Sincerely,

Naia I. Chase
[Baltimore City Public Schools student at Baltimore Design School

AEMS - FAVORABLE_ Senate Bill 289.pdf
Uploaded by: Rachel McGrain
Position: FAV

Arts Education in Maryland Schools

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

Arts Education in Maryland Schools (AEMS) writes **in strong support of Senate Bill 289**, Concentration of Poverty School Grant Program - Personnel and Per Pupil Grants - Eligible Uses.

AEMS is a statewide nonprofit, committed to ensuring that all students in the state of Maryland have access to high quality arts education. We envision a public education system in Maryland that supports, cultivates, nurtures, and uplifts ALL students' creativity through a robust arts education experience so that they can thrive in a healthy society. We regularly engage with arts educators around the state to learn about their successes and challenges as well as support them through professional development opportunities.

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.

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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. 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 unnecessarily 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.

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,

Rachel McGrain
Executive Director
Arts Education in Maryland Schools (AEMS)
rmcgrain@aems-edu.org

Senate Bill 289 - MEC Testimony.pdf
Uploaded by: Rick Tyler, Jr.-CoChair
Position: FAV

Maryland Education Coalition

Ellie Mitchell & Rick Tyler, Co-Chairs

Web site - www.marylandeducationcoalition.org *** **Email** – md.education.coaliton@gmail.com

February 3, 2026

Senate Bill 289 - SUPPORT
Concentration of Poverty School Grant Program–Personnel and Per Pupil Grants–Eligible Uses
Senate Budget and Taxation Committee

Founded during 1980, the Maryland Education Coalition (MEC) has been advocating for adequate funding, equitable policies, and transparent accountability in Maryland for over 45 years. As major stakeholders, our members have extensive experience as advisors, advocates, and contributors for a wide range of public education issues and operations at the local, state, and national level. This has included membership of the Thornton and Kirwan Commission, and the Study of Adequacy of Funding for Education in the State Of Maryland to name a few.

Therefore, we have been highly active with the development, implementation and reviews of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future and many other policies, regulations, and programs throughout Maryland. We also believe that the Concentration of Poverty School Grant Program is critical to meet the needs of students living in poverty who would not otherwise have adequate access.

Senate Bill 289 would repeal the limitation on the authorization to use personnel grants and per pupil grants under the Concentration of Poverty School Grant Program to provide certain fine arts instructional programs through fiscal year 2027. This limitation must be repealed in order to ensure all eligible students have adequate, equitable access to all core subject areas as defined within Chapter 13A.04.16 - Programs in Fine Arts.

In Maryland, a Core Academic Subject is defined as "one where students receive core content credit" and include the following subjects:

- **Art, music, dance, drama/theater**
- Social studies: civics and government, history, geography, economics
- English
- Reading or language arts
- Mathematics
- Science
- World Languages

Also, there is considerable evidence that Arts Education promotes social-emotional learning. Another study found that "Teenagers and young adults of low socioeconomic status (SES) who have a history of in-depth arts involvement show better academic outcomes than do low-SES youth who have less arts involvement. They earn better grades and demonstrate higher rates of college enrollment and attainment." (SOURCE HERE)

So, to deny the 300,000 to 450,000 FARMs students who may be eligible for the Concentration of Poverty School Grant Program would also deny them adequate access to all core subject areas accessible to others, especially those that are also a graduation requirement.

Therefore, the Maryland Education Coalition urges the members of the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee to issue a favorable report on Senate Bill 289.

BC - FAVORABLE_ SB289.pdf
Uploaded by: Riya Gupta
Position: FAV

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

The Blueprint Coalition is a coalition of more than 30 organizations representing hundreds of thousands of Marylanders and is co-led by Strong Schools Maryland and the Maryland Education Coalition. The coalition is dedicated to the full implementation and funding of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future and works to ensure that Maryland's public education system meets the needs of all students, particularly those most impacted by systemic inequities. **The Blueprint Coalition offers favorable testimony in support of Senate Bill 289.**

Senate Bill 289 is about preserving the integrity and intent of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future by maintaining flexibility for schools that serve students experiencing concentrated poverty. At the heart of the Blueprint is a recognition that students' needs vary by community, and that local school communities are best positioned to determine how resources can most effectively support their students. SB 289 protects that principle by eliminating a looming sunset that would unnecessarily restrict how concentration of poverty grant funds may be used.

Community schools are a cornerstone of the Blueprint's vision. These schools are designed to respond to the specific academic, social, emotional, and community needs of their students by aligning resources with lived realities. That work depends on flexibility. When school leaders, educators, families, and community partners collaborate to identify priorities, they must have the ability to invest in the supports and programs that make the greatest difference locally. Reverting to a more limited and prescriptive use of concentration of poverty funds would undermine that work and weaken the promise of community schools.

Under current law, concentration of poverty funds from the personnel and per pupil grants may be used through fiscal year 2027 to support the programs required under COMAR 13A.04. These programs represent the full scope of a well-rounded education, including English language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, physical education, and the arts, which are core to student learning, engagement, and long-term success. Allowing this flexibility was a deliberate choice at the outset of Blueprint implementation, recognizing that schools serving high-need populations require the ability to invest across the full educational experience.

Allowing this authority to expire would force schools into artificial tradeoffs that do not reflect student needs. Community schools would lose the ability to sustain staffing, programming, and instructional supports that have already been built using these funds disrupting planning and runs counter to the Blueprint's emphasis on long-term, sustainable improvement.

Maryland cannot achieve a world-class education system if we undermine the tools that schools need to meet students where they are. Senate Bill 289 affirms trust in community schools, respects local expertise, and keeps the Blueprint aligned with its original promise.

For these reasons, the Blueprint Coalition urges the committee to issue a favorable report on Senate Bill 289.

Please contact Riya Gupta at riya@strongschoolsmaryland.org for additional questions.

Testimony re- Blueprint Arts Sunsetting 26.pdf
Uploaded by: Robert Miller
Position: FAV

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.

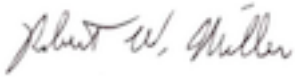
Arts education is critical and transformative for our students. As mentioned earlier, the arts offer unique ways to connect and engage with the world around us, which often leads to a strengthened sense of belonging. The arts support social-emotional skill development that helps children thrive in all 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 sunsetting 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

Retired Band Director, Howard County Public Schools
Baltimore Arts Education Initiative Committee Member

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SB289 Testimony - City Schools - FAV.pdf
Uploaded by: Tiffany Byrd
Position: FAV

BALTIMORE CITY
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Brandon Scott, Mayor
City of Baltimore
Robert Salley, Chair
Board of School Commissioners
Sonja Brookins Santelises
Chief Executive Officer

Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 289:
Concentration of Poverty School Grant Program –
Personnel and Per Pupil Grants – Eligible Uses

Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
February 3, 2026

The Baltimore City Public School System (City Schools) supports Senate Bill 289, which seeks to repeal the FY27 sunset on the authorization regarding use of Concentrations of Poverty (CPG) funds to meet fine arts instructional program requirements, as per COMAR 13A.04.16.01. Since the initial passage of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future (Blueprint), this provision has proved critical in providing a vital funding stream to ensure equitable access to comprehensive arts education for students in high-need schools.

In Baltimore City, Blueprint CPG funds have supported the creation of new fine arts positions, expanding student access to a wider variety of fine arts disciplines and experiences and allowing for arts programming that previously did not exist. As a result of this investment, City Schools has increased the number of fine art teachers from 174 in 2017-18 to 328 in 2025-26.

The benefits of arts education have long been well-documented as essential for student success, including enhanced critical thinking and improved social-emotional well-being. Elimination of the sunset, as proposed in Senate Bill 289, is crucial to ensuring all students, particularly those in historically under-resourced schools, have access to mandated arts education such as dance, music, theatre, and visual arts.

Passage of this legislation will mean preserving support for equitable, comprehensive arts pathways, while improving student attendance and engagement. City Schools respectfully requests a favorable committee report of Senate Bill 289.