



TO: Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

BILL: Senate Bill (SB) 0324 – Higher Education - Public Senior Higher Education Institutions - Direct Admission Program

DATE: February 10, 2026

POSITION: Support with Amendments

The Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC), the Maryland State Board of Education (State Board), and the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) support **Senate Bill 0324 – Higher Education - Public Senior Higher Education Institutions - Direct Admission Program** with Amendments. The bill establishes a statewide direct admission program beginning in the 2027-2028 academic year that allows eligible Maryland high school students who meet the college and career readiness (CCR) standard to receive conditional offers of admission to participating public senior higher education institutions.

The proposed bill requires MHEC to administer the direct admission program through the Commission's financial aid system and the Common Application. In addition, the bill requires MHEC and MSDE to jointly establish a process for notifying the Commission of each high school student in the State who has met the CCR standard. The legislation also includes a requirement for the Commission to generate customized lists of participating public senior higher education institutions for each eligible high school student.

MHEC and MSDE support Senate Bill 0324, which establishes a clear and equitable statewide approach to expanding access to Maryland's public senior higher education institutions by using the CCR standard as a recognized, meaningful measure of a student's preparedness for postsecondary success. The sister education agencies endorse the bill's fundamental structure, which offers eligible high school students conditional admission, streamlining the high school-to-college transition, and creating a more transparent, student-centered admissions process. MHEC and MSDE believe this approach can help reduce disparities in access to postsecondary opportunities by ensuring that students who have demonstrated readiness are more consistently identified and informed, particularly for students from underserved communities.

MHEC and MSDE respectfully request the following amendments to ensure the successful implementation of SB0324:

- Requiring the Commission, the Department, the University System of Maryland, Morgan State University, and St. Mary's College of Maryland to jointly execute a memorandum of understanding (MOU) that establishes a unified admission standard for the direct admission program. This standard would apply to the institutions signing the MOU and to any institutions that may choose to opt-in in the future.
- Maintaining the CCR standard as established in § 7–205.1(A) of the Education Article as the baseline for student eligibility for the direct admission program and incorporating additional requirements, such as high school grade point average (GPA) and additional coursework, accepted by all the senior higher education institutions signing the MOU. These components together would constitute the

academic criterion for admission for eligible students (the unified admission standard).

- Removing the requirement to utilize the Commission’s financial aid system and the Common Application to administer the direct admission program and requiring instead a feasibility study to identify the financial cost and the technical, legal, and operational mechanisms needed to effectively implement the direct admission program outlined in SB0324.
- Removing the requirement for the Commission to generate customized lists of participating institutions for each eligible high school student and requiring, instead, as part of the feasibility study, an evaluation of whether a system could be developed to integrate student academic data with financial aid eligibility data to provide simultaneous admission and affordability notifications to students.
- Modifying the timeline for the direct admission program to be operational as follows: design and planning will occur in fiscal years 2026 and 2027, during which MSDE and MHEC will develop a plan for establishing a direct admission program for participating institutions, including a timeline for technology identification, with the goal of launching a direct admissions program for students by school year 2028–2029.

With these amendments, MHEC, the State Board, and MSDE strongly support **SB0324**, and look forward to collaborating with the sponsor, legislative committees, and participating public senior higher education institutions to implement the direct admission program. We believe these amendments preserve 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 higher education systems in service of Maryland students.

Please contact Laurel Cratsley, Interim Executive Director of Government Affairs, at laurel.cratsley@maryland.gov or at 410-767-0906, or Zach Hands, Executive Director of the State Board, at zachary.hands1@maryland.gov, or Meghan Music, Executive Director of External Affairs, at meghan.music1@maryland.gov or at 667-234-0783, if you would like any additional information.