

Testimony in Support With Amendments

Senate Bill 343 – Post College and Career Readiness Pathways – Payment of Costs

Before the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

Chair, Vice Chair, and Distinguished Members of the Committee:

My name is The Honorable, Dr. Cashenna A. Cross, and I offer this testimony in support of Senate Bill 343 with amendments.

Throughout my career in public service — as a United States Air Force veteran, educator, municipal leader, and advocate for youth advancement — I have witnessed the transformational impact that occurs when preparation meets opportunity. When students are equipped early, families gain stability and communities gain strength.

Maryland's College and Career Readiness framework represents one of the most meaningful commitments we have made to our young people: that readiness for adulthood should never be determined by zip code or circumstance.

I support the intent of Senate Bill 343 because it recognizes the fiscal pressures local school systems face as participation in dual enrollment, career credentialing, apprenticeship, and advanced academic pathways continues to grow. Sustainable programs require responsible management.

However, flexibility must be balanced with fairness.

As a professional licensed by the Commissioner for the State of Maryland, I work closely with families across income levels and maintain a clear understanding of how policy decisions affect households living below the poverty line as well as working-class families striving to remain financially stable. Too often, policy unintentionally creates a pressure point where those just above eligibility thresholds carry the greatest burden.

We must be careful not to solve one funding challenge by shifting new costs onto the middle class — families who already face rising housing, childcare, transportation, and healthcare expenses. These are hardworking Marylanders who do not qualify for assistance yet do not have unlimited flexibility in their household budgets.

The Blueprint for Maryland's Future positioned College and Career Readiness pathways as equalizers. If access begins to depend on a family's ability to absorb additional fees, we risk creating a quiet barrier that discourages participation among students who would benefit most.

The amendments I respectfully recommend ensure that equity remains central while allowing counties operational flexibility: establishing sliding-scale affordability rather than unrestricted fee authority; ensuring statewide consistency so opportunity does not vary by county wealth; providing hardship protections for families experiencing temporary financial disruption; and requiring transparency and reporting so policymakers can measure outcomes fairly.

CCR pathways are not optional enhancements. They are workforce development tools, economic mobility pathways, and long-term investments in Maryland's competitiveness.

We must expand opportunity without over-taxing or over-burdening the very middle-class families who sustain our communities.

With thoughtful amendments that preserve access while supporting fiscal responsibility, Senate Bill 343 moves Maryland forward.

I respectfully request a favorable report with amendments.

Respectfully submitted,

The Honorable, Dr. Cashenna A. Cross

Councilwoman-at-Large, City of Glenarden

Municipal Advocate

■ 571-719-8784