Date: February 24, 2026

To: Senators of the Maryland General Assembly

From: Kathy Benson, Program Director, Tequity4All

Subject: Necessity of Statewide Guidance for Artificial Intelligence Education in Schools and Professional Development for Educators

My name is Kathy Benson, Program Director of the nonprofit Tequity4All, a fiscally sponsored project of the Digital Harbor Foundation. I strongly support SB720, the AI Ready Schools Act, with the Sponsor's Amendments.

I praise the important work the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) has done in writing State Artificial Intelligence guidance. I urge local school systems to follow suit and set operationalized AI policies tailored to their needs. Teacher professional development is essential. Forming a collaborative will facilitate this work.

I want to share my perspective, informed by my background as an experienced software engineer, a veteran computer science teacher, a leader of the successful Maryland Elementary School Computer Science Ambassador program, and the chair of the Advocacy and Policy Committee of the Maryland Chapter of the Computer Science Teachers' Association (CSTA).

The Current Landscape:

Maryland is a national leader in Computer Science (CS) instruction, with 100% of high schools offering at least one high-quality CS course. This foundation is critical, as Computer Science is the bedrock of AI literacy. Artificial Intelligence has already moved into education; 86% of college students report using an average of 2.1 AI tools to support their studies (Digital Education Council). Whether educators officially include AI in the curriculum or not, AI is already an integral part of our students' world.

A Personal Perspective on the Power of CS and AI:

In an age of AI, high-quality computer science instruction is foundational. As a former elementary computer science teacher, I have seen firsthand the spark that ignites when a young student realizes they can command a machine to solve a problem. I've watched students who struggled in traditional subjects suddenly thrive when given the logical, creative sandbox of computer science. It doesn't just teach them to code; it transforms their engagement and enhances their problem-solving capacity, carrying over into every other subject.

Now, in my current role as a professional developer and staunch statewide advocate for elementary computer science, I see that same transformation in our educators. I have led countless professional development sessions where teachers—many of whom were initially intimidated by technology—shared testimonials about how this instruction became a "game

changer" for their teaching practice. They aren't just teaching a new subject; they are adopting a new way of helping children think.

In my role as a professional developer, I practice what I preach by using generative AI daily as a thought partner to streamline my workflow and spark new ideas. Whether I am brainstorming creative lesson plans, drafting professional development materials, or crafting communications, AI serves as a collaborative sounding board, helping me iterate more quickly. As a knowledgeable AI practitioner, I need to fact-check AI responses, not supply PPI, and watch out for bias. This hands-on experience allows me to support educators better as they navigate these tools, showing them how AI can be a powerful ally in enhancing their teaching practices when used responsibly.

The true value of computer science (CS) lies beyond merely teaching students to use AI technical tools. It is a transformative discipline that empowers students to become creators, capable of leveraging technology to address complex challenges. This empowerment underscores the critical need for AI literacy today. Such skills are essential for students to navigate a world increasingly impacted by AI effectively. Our focus must be on ensuring students develop a deep understanding of how these tools function and how to think critically about using them to enhance their education, while simultaneously preventing the negative pitfalls of overdependence.

Addressing Risks Through Proactive Guidance:

Educators have legitimate concerns about AI, including student privacy, data security, bias, hallucinations, and the potential for students' over-reliance on it - to name a few. As the guidance explains, “AI systems generate outputs based on patterns in data; they do not possess understanding, context-awareness, or professional judgment. They can produce drafts, explanations, and examples that support instruction but are not verified sources of truth and may contain inaccuracies or bias.” However, leaving teachers to navigate these complexities alone is not a sustainable solution.

I applaud MSDE’s valuable work in writing state guidance. MSDE built the guidance upon existing policy regarding privacy, data handling, and academic integrity. It goes further to interpret them in light of international age-appropriateness AI guidelines and the South Regional Education Board (SREB) Commission on AI in Education recommendations. It provides thoughtful insights on both the opportunities and the challenges of AI use in Education. The State AI guidance provides a consistent roadmap for all of us to address such challenges. MSDE has also published a Local Planning Guide to accompany the state guidance. As Local School Systems operationalize the state guidance, they will benefit from this Local Planning guide.

AI technology is evolving rapidly. Publishing initial state guidance is courageous. I acknowledge that the guidance needs to be a living document that MSDE revises in a process of continuous improvement.

Professional Development:

I agree with the guidance when it says, “AI is not a substitute for teacher expertise.” Furthermore, MSDE’s balanced approach, which keeps the human in the loop, is wise. Now that MSDE has written the guidance, I look forward to the way it prioritizes “ongoing professional development as essential to effective AI use.”

Now, based on this guidance, educators need a structured framework to help them break down AI into developmentally appropriate concepts, such as:

- **Data Literacy:** Understanding how AI learns from data.
- **Algorithmic Training:** How AI identifies patterns to make predictions.
- **Human Oversight:** The essential role of humans in ensuring the quality and ethics of AI results.

For this framework to be applied effectively, educators require professional development. As an example of the potential scope, the Day of AI has spearheaded an initiative to support AI training for 5,000 teachers in Rwanda, with plans to eventually extend the program to train every teacher in the country (press release).

Here in Maryland, PD needs to be co-designed with certified Maryland teachers and customized to their specific instructional context. We must implement professional learning and curriculum redevelopment while acknowledging the heavy demands already placed on our teachers. This journey is a marathon, not a sprint.

Fortunately, we are not starting from scratch in this critical endeavor. Our community is home to the Maryland Center for Computing Education (MCCE), a highly respected organization that has already demonstrated significant foresight and initiative in this area. The MCCE is widely recognized for its professional development programs for educators, which have not only laid the foundational work but also positioned it exceptionally well, in terms of expertise and community trust, to lead the way forward and ensure the successful realization of our shared goals. Their existing momentum and proven track record in training and supporting teachers make them the ideal partner to spearhead professional learning.

Launching the Collaborative:

State and Local Guidance supported by PD is only the beginning. After adopting state and local guidance and providing professional development, we still need:

- **Curriculum Development and Adaptation**: Leveraging existing resources like the Day of AI and the AILit Framework to create and implement K-12 AI literacy resources statewide.

- **Dual-Focus AI Integration**: Establishing a model that combines "Learning with AI" (using tools to enhance learning) and "Learning About AI" (understanding mechanics and ethics), anchored in a robust K-12 computer science pathway.
- **Assessment Redesign**: Moving away from traditional analytical assessments that can be easily automated by AI and toward evaluations that require authentic voice, ethical reflection, and human insight.
- **Systemic Flexibility**: Providing local school systems with the flexibility to pilot, test, and iterate on these new instructional models and technologies.
- **Redefining Literacy**: Prioritizing "uniquely human" dispositions—such as critical thinking, collaboration, and empathy—within the existing curriculum.

The collaborative will serve as an organizational structure to accomplish this work together.

The Opportunity for Maryland:

By issuing state AI guidance, Maryland demonstrates that we are prepared to address the challenges presented by this technological shift. Moving forward, we must guarantee equitable AI education. Equity requires that all students achieve AI Literacy through computer science competency, and that all teachers are ready to support this learning. Only then will students be empowered to shape AI's impact on their lives.

Sincerely,

Kathy Benson, Program Director, Tequity4All