



From: Jonathan Mosen, Executive Director, Accessibility Excellence

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To: Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

Re: Favorable with Amendments – SB0720 – Artificial Intelligence Ready Schools Act

On behalf of the National Federation of the Blind of Maryland, of which I am a subject matter expert in accessibility and technology, I urge a favorable report conditional on amendment of SB0720, the Artificial Intelligence Ready Schools Act. This legislation represents an important and forward-thinking framework to guide the safe, responsible, and ethical use of artificial intelligence in Maryland's K–12 schools, but it does not ensure accessibility of information for students with disabilities.

As someone who has spent decades working at the intersection of blindness, technology, and public policy, I have seen firsthand how transformative technology can be when it is designed with inclusion in mind. I have also seen the harm that results when accessibility is treated as an afterthought.

Artificial intelligence holds extraordinary promise for blind students and students with other disabilities. AI systems today can describe visual images in rich detail, interpret charts and diagrams, summarize inaccessible web content, and provide contextual explanations that support independent learning. AI can also empower blind students to create visually compelling content by translating detailed textual descriptions into formatted documents, images, or presentations. These capabilities are not theoretical. They are already changing lives.

However, those benefits are contingent on one crucial factor: accessibility. When AI platforms fail to comply with established accessibility standards—such as the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG)—students who rely on screen readers, refreshable Braille displays, or other

assistive technologies are locked out. While their classmates experiment, create, and innovate, they struggle simply to access the interface. That is not equitable, and it is not acceptable.

SB0720 rightly requires the Department of Education to publish guidance for students, educators, and administrators . We respectfully urge the Committee to strengthen this provision by clarifying that guidance directed to “students” explicitly includes students with disabilities. This small but powerful clarification would signal that inclusion is not optional. It would also reduce the burden on local educators who might otherwise be left to conduct time-consuming and frustrating trials to determine which tools are accessible.

The bill also calls for the annual evaluation and certification of AI tools by a Maryland institution of higher education . Expertise in artificial intelligence does not automatically confer expertise in accessibility. Therefore, we recommend amending the bill to ensure that evaluations include explicit consideration of compatibility with nonvisual access technology. A tool cannot truly be deemed “consistent with State guidelines” if it excludes a portion of the student population.

Additionally, the creation of the Maryland AI Education Collaborative is a commendable feature of this bill . The Collaborative’s work will shape policy, professional development, and procurement practices statewide. For that reason, it is essential that disability representation be included at the table. We respectfully recommend adding the Secretary of the Maryland Department of Disabilities (or their designee) and the Executive Director of the Maryland Initiative for Digital Accessibility (or their designee) as members of the Collaborative. Their expertise will help ensure that accessibility considerations are embedded from the outset rather than retrofitted later.

Finally, when the Collaborative reports annually on the level and quality of AI use , we urge the Committee to require reporting on whether adopted AI tools are compatible with assistive technologies and facilitate the full inclusion of students with disabilities. What gets measured gets managed. If accessibility is included in reporting requirements, it will remain visible and prioritized.

Maryland has an opportunity to lead the nation. By incorporating modest but meaningful amendments, this bill can ensure that artificial intelligence is not merely innovative, but inclusive. When accessibility is required at the procurement stage, it also sends a powerful

market signal to developers: if you want your tools in Maryland schools, they must work for all students. That is how we harness the power of procurement for good.

The National Federation of the Blind of Maryland is optimistic about artificial intelligence. We believe in its promise. But promise alone is not enough. Equity must be designed into the system.

For these reasons, we respectfully request a favorable report with the amendments described above on SB0720. Thank you for your consideration. Feel free to contact me with questions or for more information at 410-659-9314 or at JMosen@nfb.org.