

SB 70 - Support - MWA.pdf

Uploaded by: Brandon Butler

Position: FAV

MWA Members

Anne Arundel County
Anne Arundel Workforce
Development Corporation
Kirkland Murray, Executive Director

Baltimore City
Mayor's Office of Employment
Development
MacKenzie Garvin, Director

Baltimore County
Baltimore County Department of
Economic and Workforce
Development
Jonathan Sachs, Director

Carroll County
Carroll County Workforce
Development
Heather Lee Powell, Manager

Frederick County
Frederick County Workforce
Services
Michelle Day, Director

Howard County
Howard County Office of Workforce
Development
Stephanie Adibe, Director

Lower Shore
Lower Shore Workforce Alliance
(Somerset, Wicomico, & Worcester,
Counties)
*Leslie Porter-Cabell, Workforce
Director*

Montgomery County
WorkSource Montgomery, Inc.
*Anthony Featherstone, Executive
Director*

Prince George's County
Prince George's County Workforce
Development Board
*Walter Simmons, Executive
Director*

Southern Maryland
Southern Maryland Job Source
(Calvert, Charles, & St. Mary's
Counties)
Ruthy Davis, Director

Susquehanna Region
Susquehanna Workforce Network,
Inc. (Cecil & Harford Counties)
Kimberly Justus, Executive Director

Upper Shore
Upper Shore Workforce Investment
Board (Caroline, Dorchester, Kent,
Queen Anne's, & Talbot Counties)
Ellen LaFrankie, Executive Director

Western Maryland
Western Maryland Consortium
(Allegheny, Garrett &
Washington Counties)
Stacey Ferrare, Executive Director

January 26, 2026

The Honorable Brian Feldman, Chair
Senate Education, Energy & the Environment Committee
2 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Chairman Feldman:

On behalf of the Maryland Workforce Association (MWA), I write to express strong support for Senate Bill 70: Adult Education – High School Diploma Pathways – GED Option Pilot Program and MDiplomaWorks Pathway.

MWA represents the thirteen local workforce development boards across Maryland. Our mission is to strengthen the workforce system, advance economic mobility, and foster meaningful connections between education, employers, and jobseekers.

SB 70 is an important step toward expanding educational and workforce opportunities. The bill establishes a GED Option Pilot Program to broaden pathways for students at risk of not completing high school, ensuring they can earn a diploma and be better prepared for postsecondary education or the workforce. It also creates the MDiplomaWorks pathway—recognizing academic and career competencies, including workforce experience, as valid routes to high school completion.

This expansion aligns with the goals of Maryland's workforce system by:

Increasing credential attainment, which correlates with higher employment rates and earnings.

Reducing barriers to workforce participation for learners who struggle in traditional pathways.

Strengthening alignment between education and workforce needs, supporting Maryland's long-term economic competitiveness.

For these reasons, the Maryland Workforce Association strongly supports passage of SB 70.

Thank you for your consideration. Should you have any questions regarding the Maryland Workforce Association, please contact Brandon Butler, Executive Director at mwaexecdirector@gmail.com.

Sincerely,

Kirkland Murray
President
Maryland Workforce Association

SB070_FAVORABLE_MOST.pdf

Uploaded by: Ellie Mitchell

Position: FAV



**SB 070 - Adult Education - High School Diploma Pathways –
GED Option Pilot Program and MDiplomaWorks Pathway
Education Energy Environment Committee
1/28/27- Position: Favorable**

The Maryland Out of School Time Network (MOST) is a statewide organization dedicated to closing opportunity gaps by expanding both the quantity and quality of afterschool and summer learning opportunities for school-aged young people. MOST also serves as the backbone organization for the Maryland Coalition for Community Schools and MENTOR Maryland | DC.

Maryland's current policies that prohibit GED instruction during traditional school hours unintentionally leave too many overage and under-credited youth without viable pathways to graduation and postsecondary success. These young people often face complex academic, economic, and personal barriers that make traditional high school completion unrealistic without additional flexibility and support.

SB 070 offers a promising solution by allowing GED instruction to occur during the school day and by pairing academic recovery with career-connected learning and Industry-Recognized Credentials. This integrated approach better meets students where they are, increases engagement, and creates clear on-ramps to employment, post-secondary education, or training. Importantly, it also supports the Blueprint for Maryland's Future goal of having 40 percent of Maryland students earn Industry-Recognized Credentials.

As the GED Option Pilot moves forward, MOST encourages the inclusion of a structured mentoring component. Research and practice consistently show that mentoring significantly improves outcomes for opportunity youth by providing consistent adult support, academic encouragement, and career navigation.

SB 070 represents a thoughtful and necessary step toward creating more equitable, flexible, and effective pathways for Maryland's young people. MOST respectfully urges the Committee to issue a **favorable report** on SB 070.

Ellie Mitchell, Director
MOST Network/MD4CS/MENTOR MD|DC
emitchell@mostnetwork.org

Maryland Out of School Time Network / Maryland Coalition for Community Schools

1500 Union Ave / Suite 2300
Baltimore MD 21211 / 410 374-7692
www.mostnetwork.org

MD Catholic Conference_SB 70_FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Garrett O'Day

Position: FAV



MARYLAND
CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE

January 28, 2026

SB 70

**Adult Education - High School Diploma Pathways - GED Option Pilot Program
and MDiplomaWorks Pathway**

Education, Energy and the Environment Committee

Position: FAVORABLE

The Maryland Catholic Conference offers this testimony in support of Senate Bill 70. The Catholic Conference is the public policy representative of the three (arch)dioceses serving Maryland, which together encompass over one million Marylanders. Statewide, their parishes, schools, hospitals and numerous charities combine to form our state's second largest social service provider network, behind only our state government.

Senate Bill 70 would provide alternative pathways to a high school diploma in two ways. The first is through a pilot program that expands the current GED Option Program to students beyond English language learners who are at significant risk of not completing high school. The pilot program will enroll 150 students from each LEA with a view toward permanent expansion pending the success of the pilot program. The second is through alternative pathways to a high school diploma through the creation of the MDiplomaWorks Pathway. The pathway program will recognize and certify high school diploma achievement through demonstrated academic and career competencies. The program will offer an opportunity to earn a GED through demonstrated formal assessments, credentials, career and technical training or on-the-job experience.

The Conference supports legislation that promotes opportunity for all Marylanders within the inherent intersection of education and the dignity of work. In his encyclical *Laborem Exercens*, Pope St. John Paul II stated, "Work is a good thing for man-a good thing for his humanity-because through work man not only transforms nature, adapting it to his own needs, but he also achieves fulfilment as a human being and indeed, in a sense, becomes 'more a human being'". By creating the MDiplomaWorks pathway, which awards credit for industry-recognized credentials and on-the-job learning, Maryland acknowledges the profound dignity found in various labor backgrounds as a pathway to achieve GED equivalency. Obtaining a GED in turn ensures that laborers will never be denied opportunities due to a lack a formal high school degree or the equivalent.

Providing otherwise marginalized students and adults with a specialized pathway to graduation before they withdraw from school or, alternatively, after they have gained commensurate experience and achievement in the labor force as adults, ensures they remain tethered to support systems and are better equipped in workforce or postsecondary education.

For these reasons, the Conference respectfully urges a favorable report on Senate Bill 70.

MDCC_SB 70_Favorable.pdf

Uploaded by: Grason Wiggins

Position: FAV



Senate Bill 70

Position: Favorable

Committee: Education, Energy, and the Environment

Date: January 28, 2026

Founded in 1968, the Maryland Chamber of Commerce (“Maryland Chamber”) is a statewide coalition of more than 7,000 members working to develop and promote strong public policy that ensures sustained economic growth and opportunity for all Marylanders.

Senate Bill 70 (“SB 70”) creates the MDiplomaWorks program, which would establish a fourth alternative diploma pathway for adult learners to demonstrate high school level proficiency through a combination of workforce and academic credentials.

The Maryland Chamber strongly supports job creation and economic mobility, and SB 70 will open doors for many of the 500,000+ Marylanders who do not have a high school diploma. By establishing the MDiplomaWorks program, SB 70 will create opportunities for more Marylanders to access training opportunities, career pathways, and high-paying careers. **For these reasons, the Maryland Chamber of Commerce respectfully requests a favorable report on SB 70.**

SB070 MALMB Testimony.docx.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Kovacs

Position: FAV



**Local power, collective voice
for Maryland's children, youth and families**

January 28, 2025

SUPPORT – SB070 - Adult Education – High School Diploma Pathways – GED Option Pilot Program and MDiplomaWorks Pathway

Dear Senators:

On behalf of the Maryland Association of Local Management Boards, I am writing in support of **SB070 - Adult Education – High School Diploma Pathways – GED Option Pilot Program and MDiplomaWorks Pathway** which creates more pathways for people to obtain their GED. The GED Option Pilot Program will expand opportunities for people to earn their diploma and enter the workforce.

Local Management Boards in each county and jurisdiction in the State of Maryland conduct community needs assessments and address the needs of children and families in their respective jurisdiction. We regularly work with youth and families who are facing unemployment or underemployment. Failure to graduate is one of the barriers for young people trying to reach economic security. There are many reasons why a young person may not be able to complete high school. We should be supporting alternative pathways for young people to complete their education so they may have higher earnings and access to better jobs.

We urge you to support SB070 - Adult Education – High School Diploma Pathways – GED Option Pilot Program and MDiplomaWorks Pathway to create more access for obtaining GEDs and education.

Sincerely,

Pamela M. Brown, PhD
Legislative Chair
Maryland Association of Local Management Boards

1.26 SB 70 - Adult Education - High School Diploma

Uploaded by: Lonia Muckle

Position: FAV



SB 70 - Adult Education - High School Diploma Pathways - GED Option Pilot Program and MDiplomaWorks Pathway

Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

January 28, 2026

SUPPORT

Chair Feldman, Vice-Chair, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of Senate Bill 70. This bill will expand equitable pathways to a high school diploma for Maryland residents who face barriers in traditional education settings.

The CASH Campaign of Maryland promotes economic advancement for low-to-moderate income individuals and families in Baltimore and across Maryland. CASH accomplishes its mission through operating a portfolio of direct service programs, building organizational and field capacity, and leading policy and advocacy initiatives to strengthen family economic stability. CASH and its partners across the state achieve this by providing free tax preparation services through the IRS program 'VITA', offering free financial education and coaching, and engaging in policy research and advocacy. **Almost 4,000 of CASH's tax preparation clients earn less than \$10,000 annually. More than half earn less than \$20,000.**

Traditional high school diploma requirements do not fit every student's circumstances. Many students who struggle to complete high school are not disengaged or unmotivated. Instead, they face challenges such as unstable housing, caregiving responsibilities, employment demands, or interruptions to their education. When these students fall behind, the traditional system often offers limited options to re-engage. SB 70 responds to this gap by providing a targeted pilot program that gives at-risk students a clear pathway to a diploma based on demonstrated skills and competencies rather than time spent in school alone.

The GED Option Pilot Program will allow Maryland schools to identify students who are most at risk of not completing high school and provide them with a supported pathway to graduation. This opportunity can reduce dropout rates and improve long-term outcomes for students who might otherwise join the workforce without a diploma, negatively affecting their future earning potential.

The MDiplomaWorks Pathway acknowledges that learning occurs in many settings, including classrooms, training programs, and workplaces. By allowing a combination of coursework, assessments, credentials, and work experience to count toward a diploma, the pathway aligns education with workforce expectations and supports students who are building skills while supporting themselves or their families.

A high school diploma is a gateway to stable employment, postsecondary education, and financial security. Importantly, SB 70 does not lower expectations; it offers different ways to meet them. Thus, reflecting a commitment to educational equity and economic opportunity.

We encourage you to return a favorable report for SB 70.

Creating Assets, Savings and Hope

SB70_Testimony_PeopleOnTheGo (1).pdf

Uploaded by: Mat Rice

Position: FAV

TESTIMONY ON SENATE BILL 70
Adult Education – High School Diploma Pathways –
GED Option Pilot Program and MDiplomaWorks Pathway

Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
January 28, 2026 at 1 PM

POSITION: FAVORABLE

Bill Sponsor: Chair, Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
(By Request – Departmental – Labor)

Dear Chairperson Feldman and Members of the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee:

on behalf of People on the Go of Maryland, the statewide self-advocacy and systems advocacy organization run for and by people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. We are writing to express our strong support for Senate Bill 70, which establishes the GED Option Pilot Program and the MDiplomaWorks pathway. We respectfully request a favorable report on this important legislation.

For many people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, the traditional path to a high school diploma can be extremely difficult or even impossible. Some of us struggle with standardized tests. Some of us need more hands-on learning and real-world experience. Some of us have had our education interrupted or have not received the support we needed in traditional school settings. Senate Bill 70 recognizes that there is more than one way to learn and more than one way to earn a high school diploma.

The GED Option Pilot Program: Opening New Pathways

The GED Option Pilot Program will expand opportunities for students who are at significant risk of not completing high school through the traditional route. This includes many students with disabilities who face barriers in conventional educational settings. Research shows that students with disabilities who participate in GED programs with appropriate accommodations—such as extended time, extra breaks, separate testing rooms, and alternative test formats—can successfully earn their high school credentials.

Alternative pathways to high school diplomas have proven successful in other states. In California, students with significant cognitive disabilities who participate in alternative diploma pathways have gained access to postsecondary education and employment opportunities that were previously out of reach. These programs recognize that earning a high school diploma is not just about academics—it is a rite of passage that opens doors to higher-income jobs, greater independence, and a higher quality of life.

The MDiplomaWorks Pathway: Recognizing Real-World Skills

The MDiplomaWorks pathway is especially important for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities because it recognizes that learning happens in many places—not just in classrooms. This pathway allows individuals to earn a high school diploma by demonstrating career competencies, earning industry-recognized credentials, completing career and technical education coursework, and gaining on-the-job learning experience. This approach honors the skills we develop through work and training, not just what we can memorize for a test.

Research demonstrates that career and technical education (CTE) programs provide significant benefits for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Studies show that students with disabilities who participate in CTE programs, technology education, and school-to-career initiatives experience greater success in employment. The National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 found that CTE and job readiness training increase the likelihood of paid employment for students with disabilities by 7.4 times. These programs also help develop essential soft skills such as work ethic, perseverance, teamwork, critical thinking, and time management—skills that are crucial for success in any job.

For people with disabilities, earning a high school diploma has a direct impact on employment outcomes. Data from 2015 shows that among adults with disabilities aged 25-64, only 15% who had not completed high school were employed, compared to 22% with a high school diploma, 31%

with some college, and 45% with a bachelor's degree or higher. Work-based learning experiences during high school make a difference too—students with disabilities who are employed before exiting high school are nearly 3.8 times more likely to be employed one year later.

Why This Matters to Us

Many of us at People on the Go have experienced firsthand the barriers that exist when you do not have a high school diploma. Without a diploma, it is harder to get a good job. It is harder to access training programs. It is harder to be taken seriously. It affects our self-esteem and our ability to live independently in the community.

Senate Bill 70 recognizes that intelligence and ability come in many forms. Some of us are excellent workers but struggle with tests. Some of us learn best by doing, not by sitting in a classroom. The MDiplomaWorks pathway and the GED Option Pilot Program give us a fair chance to prove what we know and what we can do. They give us a chance to earn the same credential—a Maryland high school diploma—through a path that works for our learning style and our strengths.

A Thoughtful and Responsible Approach

We appreciate that Senate Bill 70 establishes the GED Option as a pilot program that will be carefully evaluated. The bill requires the Department of Labor and the State Department of Education to report on the program's effectiveness, including feedback from students, educators, and parents, and the number of students who successfully earn diplomas. This thoughtful approach ensures that the program can be improved and expanded based on real results.

The pilot program will serve at least three local school systems with geographic diversity, allowing up to 150 students per system to participate. This means that hundreds of young people who might otherwise drop out of school will have a real pathway to success. And because the program specifically targets students at significant risk of not completing high school, it will serve exactly the population that needs it most—including many students with disabilities.

Conclusion

People with intellectual and developmental disabilities deserve the opportunity to earn a high school diploma and to access the employment, education, and independence that come with it. Senate Bill 70 creates pathways that recognize our abilities, honor different ways of learning, and give us a fair chance to succeed.

People on the Go of Maryland strongly supports Senate Bill 70 and respectfully requests that this committee issue a favorable report. This legislation represents an important step toward educational equity and opportunity for all Maryland students.

Thank you for your consideration and for your commitment to supporting all Maryland students.

Respectfully submitted,

People on the Go of Maryland

For questions, please contact:

Mat Rice, Executive Director

People on the Go of Maryland

Phone: 410-925-5706

Email: mat@pogmd.org

Testimony in support of SB0070 - Adult Education -

Uploaded by: Richard KAP Kaplowitz

Position: FAV

01/28/2026

Richard Keith Kaplowitz
Frederick, MD 21703

TESTIMONY ON SB#/0070- POSITION: FAVORABLE

Adult Education - High School Diploma Pathways - GED Option Pilot Program and MDiplomaWorks Pathway

TO: Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and members of the Education, Energy and the Environment Committee

FROM: Richard Keith Kaplowitz

My name is Richard Keith Kaplowitz. I am a resident of District 3, Frederick County. I am submitting this testimony in support of SB#/0070, **Adult Education - High School Diploma Pathways - GED Option Pilot Program and MDiplomaWorks Pathway**

This bill seeks to create a pilot program to help ensure more of the residents of Maryland have a path to earning a GED diploma as a pathway to prepare for postsecondary education or entry into the workforce. The GED Testing Service lists four reasons to acquire a GED. ¹

1. Get accepted to college
2. Gain a competitive edge in the job market
3. Increase potential salary earnings
4. Personal achievement

The bill accomplish this by establishing the GED Option Pilot Program to expand the GED Option Program to students beyond English language learners to ensure a pathway for students to obtain a high school diploma and prepare for postsecondary education or the workforce. It will require the Maryland Department of Labor to establish criteria to select certain local school systems for participation in the Program and establish the MDiplomaWorks pathway as an alternative method of earning a high school diploma in the State; etc.

If Maryland is to ensure an educated workforce motivated to achieve with the resultant economic benefits to the state and the individual this bill offers a path to achieve this result.

I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on SB#/0070.

¹ <https://www.ged.com/blog/why-is-getting-a-ged-so-important-top-4-reasons-you-should-get-your-ged.html>

SB70 Support (Written).pdf

Uploaded by: Riya Gupta

Position: FAV



**Testimony in SUPPORT of
Senate Bill 70: Adult Education – High School Diploma Pathways – GED Option Pilot Program and
MDiplomaWorks Pathway**

Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

Position: Favorable

January 28, 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. **We support Senate Bill 70 because it advances the Blueprint’s goals of equity, graduation success, and strong college and career readiness pathways.**

The Blueprint calls for improved outcomes for all students, including higher graduation rates and expanded access to career-connected learning and credentials of value. Yet Maryland’s current policies leave many overage and under-credited students without realistic options to complete high school. Students facing academic gaps, economic pressures, or family responsibilities are often forced to disengage entirely before accessing alternative pathways. Senate Bill 70 addresses this failure by expanding flexible, rigorous diploma options that keep students connected to education and workforce preparation.

The GED Option Pilot Program established under this bill allows selected school systems to offer GED instruction during the school day to students at significant risk of not graduating. This approach improves re-engagement and completion while aligning with the Blueprint’s focus on reducing dropout rates and expanding access to postsecondary and workforce pathways. The pilot’s limited scope, geographic diversity, and required outcome reporting ensure accountability and evidence-based evaluation.

Senate Bill 70 also establishes the MDiplomaWorks pathway, recognizing demonstrated academic skills, industry-recognized credentials, career and technical education, and on-the-job learning as valid measures of diploma attainment. This pathway directly supports the Blueprint’s emphasis on career readiness and credential attainment aligned with labor market needs. By expanding diploma pathways that are both flexible and rigorous, Senate Bill 70 helps ensure the Blueprint’s promise reaches students who are not well served by traditional models.

For these reasons, Strong Schools Maryland respectfully urges a favorable report on Senate Bill 70.

For more information, contact Riya Gupta at riya@strongschoolsmaryland.org

HB0297_SB0070. GED Expansion. Written Testimony FI

Uploaded by: Andrew Fulginiti

Position: FWA

MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF LABOR TESTIMONY ON SENATE BILL 70

TO: Education, Energy, and Environment Committee
FROM: Andrew Fulginiti, Legislative Director, MD Labor
DATE: January 28, 2026
BILL: Expanding High School Diploma Pathways - GED Option™ Pilot Program and *MDiplomaWorks*

MDL POSITION: SUPPORT WITH DEPARTMENTAL AMENDMENT

With the attached Departmental amendment, SB0070 establishes a brand new, no-cost High School Diploma (“Diploma”) pathway: *MDiplomaWorks*.

Building upon Governor Moore’s goal of “leaving no one behind,” the bill will support the nearly 500,000 Marylanders who do not have this life-changing credential. In our State, individuals without a Diploma have a median salary that is \$10,000 less per year (\$35,597) than those with a Diploma (\$45,273), according to research by the Maryland Department of Labor’s (MD Labor) Labor Market Information Unit. Expanding Diploma pathways will help more constituents access quality careers, Registered Apprenticeships, and family-sustaining pay.

This program could be implemented with existing MD Labor resources, which is especially critical at a time when the federal Adult Education funding landscape is in jeopardy.

The *MDiplomaWorks* program outlined in SB70 establishes a fourth alternative Diploma pathway for adult learners, allowing them to combine workforce **and** academic credentials to demonstrate high school level-proficiency.

There are currently three options for Adult Learners to earn a High School Diploma in Maryland: the GED® Test, which consists of four standardized subject matter exams; the National External Diploma Program (NEDP®), a portfolio-based strategy that learners complete at their own pace with a trained NEDP Assessor; and Adult High School, where individuals aged 21 and older take traditional high school courses.

However, these existing pathways are not an effective option for *all* Marylanders, as many adults without an HSD have to juggle work and family obligations, or struggle with standardized testing. Additionally, resources to administer these pathways are stretched thin.

The *MDiplomaWorks* pathway will provide an additional, no-cost avenue for adult

www.labor.maryland.gov

learners to demonstrate high school-level proficiency through a combination of any of the following components, as approved by MD Labor and MSDE:

1. Earning an industry-recognized credential;
2. Demonstrating foundational academic skills through assessments;
3. Completing career and technical education coursework; and
4. Completing an on-the-job-learning experience.

MD Labor and MSDE will work together to more precisely define which examinations, and credentials are sufficient to demonstrate high school equivalency through the regulation process.

This enhancement will open doors for many of the **half-million** Marylanders who do not have a Diploma, allowing them to transition into training opportunities and higher-paying careers. The *MDiplomaWorks* will not only benefit the individuals who receive a Diploma, but also help grow Maryland's economy through better earnings and constituent engagement.

Finally, the Department is requesting an amendment that strikes the GED Option Pilot Program. After continued work and discussions with the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), MD Labor believes that this program will benefit from more conversation and research in partnership with MSDE and other stakeholders.

The Department respectfully requests that the Committee issue a Favorable Report with amendment on SB0070.

For questions, please contact Andrew Fulginiti, at **Andrew.Fulginiti@maryland.gov**.

www.labor.maryland.gov

SB0070 Adult Education-High School Diploma Pathway

Uploaded by: Dorothy Plantz

Position: FWA

**SB0070 – Adult Education-High School Diploma Pathways-
GED Option Pilot Program and MDiplomaWorks Pathway
EEE Committee
Favorable With Possible Adjustments**

Dear Honorable Brian Feldman, Chair, Honorable Cheryl Kagan, Vice Chair and committee members:

I support SB0070 to establish the GED Option Pilot Program and request that this pilot be expanded to include students with disabilities who exit secondary school with the Maryland High School Certificate of Program Completion within a certain frame so that students with disabilities could be afforded similar opportunities as their non-disabled peers. As a former community college administrator, I have witnessed the need for an alternative pathway that provides diploma opportunities for non-diploma students, including students with disabilities, who were unable to earn the traditional high school diploma or pass the GED test. This pathway will open postsecondary and career readiness pathways leading to enhanced employment for the adult learner and supporting Maryland's economic well-being.

Thank you for supporting the innovative MDiplomaWorks Pathway pilot.

Sincerely,

Dorothy Plantz
Community Advocate

District 12A
10128 Spring Pools Lane
Columbia MD 21044

SB70 - SWASC - MDiploma Works - FWA.pdf

Uploaded by: Madeleine Weisman

Position: FWA

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS OF BILL SB 70
Adult Education – High School Diploma Pathways – GED Option Pilot Program
and MDiplomaWorks Pathway
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
January 26, 2026

Social Work Advocates for Social Change supports SB 70 with amendments that will create a temporary GED Option Pilot Program to allow at-risk students to earn a high school diploma by examination and establish the permanent MDiplomaWorks pathway, which allows eligible adults to earn a diploma by demonstrating academic and career competencies instead of completing traditional coursework.

Maryland’s high school graduation rate stands at 85.8 percent, roughly in line with the national average. However, this overall figure masks deep and persistent disparities in diploma attainment. Graduation rates for Hispanic/Latino students (71.4 percent), English language learners (55.8 percent), students with disabilities (69.5 percent), and economically disadvantaged students (80.8 percent) fall well below the state average. These inequities are even more pronounced in Baltimore City, where only 70.6 percent of students graduate—the lowest rate in the state. These data make clear that **many Maryland students need additional support and meaningful solutions to complete their education.**

Student retention and graduation are complex challenges that require multiple, carefully designed interventions. One frequently cited reason students leave school before earning a diploma is the need to support family members, including their own minor children. In that context, a state-sanctioned program that allows students to work while continuing their education is a promising and welcome concept. Many of these students are not disengaged from learning; rather, they are struggling to balance school with financial responsibilities.

Maryland’s child labor laws are appropriately strict, but as a result, students under 18 often cannot earn meaningful, family-supporting wages through lawful employment. When students do find work that ignores these protections, those jobs frequently fail to accommodate school schedules or educational needs. Once a student turns 18, employers may legally disregard school attendance altogether, even if the student remains enrolled. **A legitimate “earn and learn” pathway could address this gap by ensuring that employment is lawful, supportive of education, and genuinely connected to long-term career and wage growth rather than short-term, low-quality labor.**

However, **as written, Senate Bill 70 raises serious civil rights concerns.** Although the bill is framed as expanding options, history shows that alternative diploma pathways, when not tightly safeguarded, often operate as mechanisms of exclusion rather than opportunity. SB 70 allows students as young as 17 to be identified as “at significant risk” and diverted from traditional high school into GED-based or workforce-focused pathways. In practice, students labeled “at risk” are disproportionately students with disabilities, students of color, English learners, low-income students, and youth involved in foster care or the juvenile justice system. **Without explicit protections, the bill risks creating a two-tier education system that is neither equitable nor legally defensible.**

Civil rights law is clear on this point. Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), students with disabilities are entitled to a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment. Under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), states may not use alternative pathways to push out struggling students or to obscure subgroup underperformance. Under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, policies that predictably result in racial or linguistic disparities are unlawful, even absent discriminatory intent.

Yet SB 70 does not require informed and voluntary consent from students and families; does not guarantee that required academic, language, or special education services are fully provided before alternative placement; does not establish bias-resistant criteria for identifying students; and does not guarantee a student's right to return to a traditional high school pathway. **These omissions create a substantial risk of systemic civil rights violations.**

Additional concerns arise with the MDiplomaWorks pathway. Workforce-based credentials and work-based learning opportunities, without guaranteed paid placements, transportation, and equitable access to employers, are likely to advantage students with greater social and economic capital while reinforcing existing labor-market segregation. Without strong safeguards, these pathways may channel marginalized students into limited futures rather than expanding opportunity.

Finally, SB 70 measures success primarily by completion rather than outcomes. Civil-rights compliance requires more than tracking whether students exit the system; it requires assessing whether students gain access to postsecondary education, family-sustaining wages, and long-term economic mobility. **Outcome data must be tracked over time and disaggregated by race, disability status, language proficiency, and income.**

We urge the committee to amend SB 70 to require informed and voluntary participation; prohibit the replacement of legally required educational supports; establish transparent and equitable selection criteria; guarantee the right to re-enter traditional high school; ensure diploma rigor and parity; provide comprehensive and equitable supports for work-based learning; and mandate long-term, disaggregated outcome reporting.

Alternative pathways must not become civil-rights shortcuts. Equity demands that flexibility expand opportunity – not lower expectations or narrow futures.

Social Work Advocates for Social Change urges a favorable with amendments report on SB 70.

Social Work Advocates for Social Change is a coalition of MSW students at the University of Maryland School of Social Work that seeks to promote equity and justice through public policy, and to engage the communities impacted by public policy in the policymaking process.

Center for Parent Information and Resources. (n.d.). *Your rights under IDEA*.

<https://www.parentcenterhub.org/your-rights-under-idea/>

National Educational Association. (2015). *Why Students Drop Out* <https://www.nea.org/nea-today/all-news-articles/why-students-drop-out-economic-pressures-make-leaving-school-unavoidable>

Maryland State Department of Education. (2024). *Graduation Rate Information*

<https://marylandpublicschools.org/stateboard/Documents/2024/0326/Graduation-Rate-Information-A.pdf>

U.S. Department of Education. (2016). *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act—Accountability and state plans* (34 C.F.R. Parts 200 & 299). <https://www.ed.gov/media/document/dear-colleague-letter-essa-transition-january-28-2016-55475.pdf>

U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights. (2014). *Dear Colleague Letter: Resource comparability and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964*. <https://www.ed.gov/media/document/colleague-residential-facilities-201412pdf-35115.pdf>

SB70 - SWASC - MDiplomaWorks - FWA.pdf

Uploaded by: Madeleine Weisman

Position: FWA

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS OF BILL SB 70
Adult Education – High School Diploma Pathways – GED Option Pilot Program
and MDiplomaWorks Pathway
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
January 26, 2026

Social Work Advocates for Social Change supports SB 70 with amendments that will create a temporary GED Option Pilot Program to allow at-risk students to earn a high school diploma by examination and establish the permanent MDiplomaWorks pathway, which allows eligible adults to earn a diploma by demonstrating academic and career competencies instead of completing traditional coursework.

Maryland’s high school graduation rate stands at 85.8 percent, roughly in line with the national average. However, this overall figure masks deep and persistent disparities in diploma attainment. Graduation rates for Hispanic/Latino students (71.4 percent), English language learners (55.8 percent), students with disabilities (69.5 percent), and economically disadvantaged students (80.8 percent) fall well below the state average. These inequities are even more pronounced in Baltimore City, where only 70.6 percent of students graduate – the lowest rate in the stateⁱ. These data make clear that **many Maryland students need additional support and meaningful solutions to complete their education.**

Student retention and graduation are complex challenges that require multiple, carefully designed interventions. One frequently cited reason students leave school before earning a diploma is the need to support family members, including their own minor children. In that context, a state-sanctioned program that allows students to work while continuing their education is a promising and welcome concept. Many of these students are not disengaged from learning; rather, they are struggling to balance school with financial responsibilities.

Maryland’s child labor laws are appropriately strict, but as a result, students under 18 often cannot earn meaningful, family-supporting wages through lawful employment. When students do find work that ignores these protections, those jobs frequently fail to accommodate school schedules or educational needs. Once a student turns 18, employers may legally disregard school attendance altogether, even if the student remains enrolled. **A legitimate “earn and learn” pathway could address this gap by ensuring that employment is lawful, supportive of education, and genuinely connected to long-term career and wage growth rather than short-term, low-quality labor.**

However, **as written, Senate Bill 70 raises serious civil rights concerns.** Although the bill is framed as expanding options, history shows that alternative diploma pathways, when not tightly safeguarded, often operate as mechanisms of exclusion rather than opportunity. SB 70 allows students as young as 17 to be identified as “at significant risk” and diverted from traditional high school into GED-based or workforce-focused pathways. In practice, students labeled “at risk” are disproportionately students with disabilities, students of color, English learners, low-income students, and youth involved in foster care or the juvenile justice system. **Without explicit protections, the bill risks creating a two-tier education system that is neither equitable nor legally defensible.**

Civil rights law is clear on this point. Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), students with disabilities are entitled to a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment. Under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), states may not use alternative pathways to push out struggling students or to obscure subgroup underperformance. Under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, policies that predictably result in racial or linguistic disparities are unlawful, even absent discriminatory intent.

Yet SB 70 does not require informed and voluntary consent from students and families; does not guarantee that required academic, language, or special education services are fully provided before alternative placement; does not establish bias-resistant criteria for identifying students; and does not guarantee a student's right to return to a traditional high school pathway. **These omissions create a substantial risk of systemic civil rights violations.**

Additional concerns arise with the MDiplomaWorks pathway. Workforce-based credentials and work-based learning opportunities, without guaranteed paid placements, transportation, and equitable access to employers, are likely to advantage students with greater social and economic capital while reinforcing existing labor-market segregation. Without strong safeguards, these pathways may channel marginalized students into limited futures rather than expanding opportunity.

Finally, SB 70 measures success primarily by completion rather than outcomes. Civil-rights compliance requires more than tracking whether students exit the system; it requires assessing whether students gain access to postsecondary education, family-sustaining wages, and long-term economic mobility. **Outcome data must be tracked over time and disaggregated by race, disability status, language proficiency, and income.**

We urge the committee to amend SB 70 to require informed and voluntary participation; prohibit the replacement of legally required educational supports; establish transparent and equitable selection criteria; guarantee the right to re-enter traditional high school; ensure diploma rigor and parity; provide comprehensive and equitable supports for work-based learning; and mandate long-term, disaggregated outcome reporting.

Alternative pathways must not become civil-rights shortcuts. Equity demands that flexibility expand opportunity – not lower expectations or narrow futures.

Social Work Advocates for Social Change urges a favorable with amendments report on SB 70.

Social Work Advocates for Social Change is a coalition of MSW students at the University of Maryland School of Social Work that seeks to promote equity and justice through public policy, and to engage the communities impacted by public policy in the policymaking process.

Center for Parent Information and Resources. (n.d.). *Your rights under IDEA*.

<https://www.parentcenterhub.org/your-rights-under-idea/>

National Educational Association. (2015). *Why Students Drop Out* <https://www.nea.org/nea-today/all-news-articles/why-students-drop-out-economic-pressures-make-leaving-school-unavoidable>

Maryland State Department of Education. (2024). *Graduation Rate Information*

<https://marylandpublicschools.org/stateboard/Documents/2024/0326/Graduation-Rate-Information-A.pdf>

U.S. Department of Education. (2016). *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act—Accountability and state plans* (34 C.F.R. Parts 200 & 299). <https://www.ed.gov/media/document/dear-colleague-letter-essa-transition-january-28-2016-55475.pdf>

U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights. (2014). *Dear Colleague Letter: Resource comparability and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964*. <https://www.ed.gov/media/document/colleague-residential-facilities-201412pdf-35115.pdf>

ⁱ Maryland State Department of Education, 2024.

<https://marylandpublicschools.org/stateboard/Documents/2024/0326/Graduation-Rate-Information-A.pdf>

SB0070 LOI MSDE 2026.docx.pdf

Uploaded by: Laurel Cratsley

Position: INFO

TO: Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

BILL: SB0070: Adult Education – High School Diploma Pathways – GED Option Pilot Program and MDiplomaWorks Pathway

DATE: January 28, 2026

POSITION: Letter of Information

EXPLANATION:

The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) is providing information regarding Senate Bill 70. With the amendments proposed by the Maryland Department of Labor, in coordination with MSDE, the bill establishes the MDiplomaWorks pathway as an alternative method for adult learners to earn a Maryland high school diploma. The bill places administration of this pathway within the Maryland Department of Labor (MD Labor) and provides for coordination with the State Board of Education regarding the awarding of diplomas.

Senate Bill 70 authorizes the MDiplomaWorks pathway as an option for individuals who have not earned a high school diploma, are no longer subject to compulsory school attendance, and have withdrawn from a traditional public or private school program. Under the bill, individuals may demonstrate equivalency to a Maryland high school diploma through a combination of academic and career-related components, including industry-recognized credentials, formal assessments of foundational academic skills, career and technical education coursework, and on-the-job learning experiences. A diploma would be awarded upon completion of the pathway in accordance with regulations adopted by the Secretary of Labor and the State Board of Education.

MSDE notes that the bill reflects broader, ongoing discussions across state agencies regarding the need to expand access to high school diploma pathways for learners whose educational trajectories do not align with traditional models. In particular, MSDE appreciates the opportunity to collaborate with the Maryland Department of Labor to explore options to expand access to GED programming for high school-aged students, especially those who may benefit from alternative approaches to completing secondary education. MSDE supports the amendments proposed by MD Labor to remove the GED-Option pilot program from this bill and believes that further conversation and research, conducted in partnership with both agencies and additional stakeholders, will strengthen this work.

While MSDE is not responsible for administering the MDiplomaWorks pathway, the Department recognizes the importance of maintaining clarity and consistency regarding diploma requirements, equivalency, and statewide expectations. As contemplated in the bill, any awarding of a Maryland high school diploma remains subject to the authority of the State Board of Education, underscoring the need for clear regulatory alignment and communication across agencies.

MSDE respectfully provides this information to support the General Assembly's understanding of SB0070 and appreciates the continued partnership with the Maryland Department of Labor in examining strategies to expand educational access while maintaining the integrity of Maryland's diploma standards.

For further information, please contact Laurel Cratsley, Interim Executive Director of Government Affairs, at 443-571-5461 or Laurel.Cratsley@maryland.gov.