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**Written Testimony to the Ways and Means Committee
HB 26 - Public Schools - Open Enrollment – Policies and Funding
February 25, 2026**

OPPOSE

Chair Wilkins and Members of the Committee, AFT Maryland opposes HB 26 because the legislation risks undermining the progress of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future, which aims to provide equitable, high-quality education to every child regardless of zip code.

While the intent of HB 26 is to provide families with more options, the proposed funding mechanism creates a unstable financial environment for Maryland's public school districts. By requiring a "sending" county to transfer a portion of its local per-pupil funding to a "receiving" county, the bill effectively drains resources from districts that may already be struggling to maintain their infrastructure and staffing levels.

The bill also allows receiving schools to deny enrollment based on "lack of capacity" or if they cannot meet a child's "special needs." Without a more robust guarantee of inclusion, this policy could lead to de facto segregation, where high-performing schools cherry-pick students and leave more vulnerable populations behind.

Open enrollment often favors families with the means to provide their own transportation, as the bill does not mandate the receiving district to provide transit for out-of-county students. This creates a tiered system where only families with means can realistically exercise the choice provided by the bill, while low-income students may remain in underfunded sending districts.

Public schools operate on high fixed costs, such as building maintenance, utilities, and transportation routes. The exit of students does not proportionately decrease these overhead costs, leaving the students who remain in their home districts with fewer resources and potentially larger class sizes as the local tax base is diverted elsewhere.

Instead of creating a competitive market that treats students as "market share," the state should double down on its commitment to fully funding every local school system so the best school for every child is the one in their own neighborhood. Again, we ask for an unfavorable report.

