

OFFICE OF THE CHANCELLOR

WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE

Senate Bill 529

Southern Maryland Early College Teacher Pathway Program Workgroup

April 1, 2026

Favorable

Chair Wilkins, Vice Chair Feldmark, and members of the committee, Senate Bill 529 takes an important step toward building a Southern Maryland Early College Teacher Pathway by establishing the Program Workgroup and directing the University System of Maryland and stakeholders to develop recommendations for the pathway and corresponding teacher preparation program. The amended bill strengthens this effort by broadening participation to include representatives from local unions representing teachers in Southern Maryland.

In Southern Maryland, too many students face real barriers to higher education, particularly students who are low-income, first-generation, or historically underrepresented in higher education. For many of these students, the challenge is not ability. It is affordability, access, and the absence of a clear path from high school to college and into a career. USM data demonstrates that students in traditional dual enrollment programs with no clear pathway transfer far less credits than made possible by the Blueprint for Maryland's future. Moreover, traditional dual enrollment programs have not been successful in expanding access to under-resourced students. This data suggests that a more strategic approach is required.

That is why this workgroup matters. Strong pathways do not happen on their own. They require deliberate planning, coordination, and shared ownership across K–12, higher education, and state leadership. SB 529 creates the structure to do that work well by bringing together the institutions and stakeholders needed to design a coherent, credit-bearing pathway into teaching.

Early College pathways are designed to make college more attainable for Maryland students who have been historically underrepresented in higher education. These pathways will help students and families understand how high school and college coursework connect to a teaching degree and career, reduce excess credits, shorten time to degree, and lower the overall cost of becoming a teacher. For students who may not otherwise see college as financially or logistically possible, that kind of clarity and affordability can make a meaningful difference.

Maryland needs a more diverse and robust teaching workforce, and Southern Maryland needs stronger local pipelines into the profession. A structured Early College teacher pathway can help students begin preparing to teach earlier, stay connected to their home communities, and move into careers without having to leave the region to obtain a bachelor's degree.

We would truly appreciate the committee's favorable consideration of this proposal. We worked diligently to strengthen the proposal by ensuring broader stakeholder participation and reduced the fiscal note to assist with this work but to also reflect a good-faith commitment by the State as we pursue additional resource assistance through our federal delegation and private donors to support and strengthen a continued path for this work.

The University System of Maryland (USM) is composed of twelve distinguished institutions and three regional centers. We award eight out of every ten bachelor's degrees in the state. Each of USM's institutions has a distinct and unique approach to the mission of educating students and promoting the economic, intellectual, and cultural growth of its surrounding community. These institutions are located throughout the state, from western Maryland to the Eastern Shore, with the flagship campus in the Washington suburbs. The USM includes three Historically Black Institutions, comprehensive institutions and research universities, and the country's largest public online institution.

