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To: House Ways & Means Committee

The members of the National Federation of the Blind of Maryland urge the House Ways & Means Committee to give a favorable report with amendments to SB0720 – A Framework for AI in the Local School Systems.

Amendment 1: On page two of the bill where the bill lists each group to receive published guidance on its website, the bill lists “Students” as the first group. The bill should be amended to say “Students; including those with disabilities” because not all AI technology has been designed to be compatible with access technology.

By following well-established practices, developers of AI tools can ensure that their technology is accessible. However, presently there is considerable variance in terms of the degree to which AI companies comply with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG). It is critical that educators in Maryland do not inadvertently exclude students with disabilities due to ill-informed choices. Providing advice specific to students with disabilities will eliminate the need for time-consuming, and potentially frustrating, experimentation to find the most accessible solution.

By expressly requiring consideration of inclusion and accessibility, the state of Maryland may incentivize AI companies to do the right thing. If companies know that they risk another entity being chosen due to an accessibility barrier, this may encourage them to address accessibility deficits. This amendment would therefore use the power of procurement for good.

Amendment 2: On page three of the bill, where subsection E (1) says “in evaluating a prioritized list of artificial intelligence tools”, it should be amended to add “and their effectiveness in meeting non-visual access standards”. The possession of expertise in the functionality of AI tools does not guarantee knowledge of access technology, such as screen readers that speak or display in Braille what is on a computer screen.

Amendment 3: On page four of the bill, the bill lists who will be part of the Maryland AI Education Collaborative on Artificial Intelligence in K–12 Education and there are currently nine categories of members. The bill should be amended to add a tenth category where the Secretary of Disabilities or their designee is added and an eleventh category for the Executive Director of the Maryland Initiative for Digital

Accessibility or their designee. This addition is important because it will give representation to the needs of students with disabilities.

Amendment 4: On page six of the bill, the bill lists what findings the Collaborative will report each year. At the end of Subsection J (3), it should be amended to say, “and whether chosen AI tools are compatible with access technology to facilitate the full inclusion of students with disabilities”.

The bill represents a very good framework for the use of, and instruction on, artificial intelligence in K-12 education. The National Federation of the Blind of Maryland is optimistic about the benefits of AI. AI can enrich the lives of blind students and others with disabilities. We already see AI giving detailed textual or audible descriptions of visual content and answering clarifying questions for a blind student. The reverse is also true, that is to say AI can assist a blind student to produce visually compelling content once they provide a clear textual description of the content they wish to create.

AI can also synthesize material that may be on websites that pose accessibility barriers.

However, these benefits only exist if accessible options are chosen. The use of inaccessible tools is exclusionary and will cause real harm to students with disabilities, who will struggle to use tools while other students thrive.

A few small amendments to this bill will ensure that all students, including those with disabilities, can benefit from AI tools.

For those reasons, we ask for amendments before voting in favor of SB0720. For questions, please contact me at President@nfbmd.org or at 443-426-4110.