

Maryland House of Delegates,

My name is Julius Prezelski, and it's an honor to testify before the Maryland State Legislature in support of HB 943, which would make Financial Literacy a mandatory, stand-alone high school course. I retired last June after 31 years teaching Business and Computer Science at DeMatha Catholic High School and Mount St. Joseph High School. My ability to retire early wasn't luck—it was the result of applying lessons from *Get a Financial Life* by Beth Kobliner, a book that inspired me to teach Financial Literacy well before it became common. At Mount St. Joseph, I developed the course into an elective, and six years ago, it became a required, half-credit class for all students.

How did Financial Literacy become a mandatory course at Mount St. Joseph? I knew making it mandatory right away would face scheduling challenges and skepticism from faculty and administrators. Instead, I introduced it as a one-semester elective, confident that positive feedback would build support. Within two years, it became the school's most popular elective. Students were eager to share what they learned, and parents wrote to say those lessons sparked meaningful conversations at home. With such strong enthusiasm, the administration concluded that every student should take the course, and making it mandatory ultimately made scheduling simpler.

Why is Financial Literacy important at the high school level? In my years of teaching, I saw how eager students are to learn real-world skills that prepare them for life after graduation. Everyday financial decisions—renting an apartment, buying a car, taking out a loan—carry lifelong consequences if handled poorly. By teaching practical concepts such as completing tax forms, choosing credit cards, and understanding investing basics, we empower students to make smart, confident choices that benefit their futures and families. That's why I believe a state-mandated Financial Literacy course is not just valuable—it's essential!

Too many young adults graduate understanding Algebra and Shakespeare but not compound interest, budgeting, or credit scores. These aren't abstract ideas—they're everyday decisions that shape financial futures for better or worse. I've watched students light up with "Aha!" moments when they build their first budget or see how a Roth IRA started before 21 years of age can grow over time. Financial stability isn't luck—it's literacy!

The main objections to making this course mandatory are usually lack of schedule space and the cost of implementation. I disagree! When my youngest daughter attended a Howard County high school, many seniors—including her—finished classes

by noon, proving time isn't the issue. As for cost, it's zero. Numerous nonprofits and organizations provide high-quality, free curricula and teacher training. NextGen Personal Finance is a perfect example, offering everything schools need—at no cost.

A required financial literacy course levels the playing field, since not all students have parents who can teach them how to manage money, avoid debt, or save for emergencies. By making it part of the curriculum, we ensure every graduate—no matter their background—enters adulthood equipped to make informed decisions and build financial security. Schools already teach students to read critically and think scientifically; it's time we also teach them to live financially smart. Mandating financial literacy is an investment in our students' independence, our communities' strength, and our state's future.

Sincerely,

Julius Prezelski
Retired High School Business & CS Teacher