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**TO:** House Ways and Means Committee

**BILL:** House Bill (HB) 479 – Southern Maryland Early College Teacher Pathway Program and Program Workgroup – Establishment

**DATE:** February 11, 2026

**POSITION:** Support with Amendments

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The Maryland State Board of Education (State Board) and the State Department of Education (MSDE) support **House Bill 479 – Southern Maryland Early College Teacher Pathway Program and Program Workgroup – Establishment**, which establishes the Southern Maryland Early College Teacher Pathway Program and a Program Workgroup.

The proposed bill requires MSDE to administer and implement the Program in consultation with the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC), including adopting the necessary regulations. The University System of Maryland (USM) is responsible for developing the Program and the related teacher preparation pathway. Students enrolled in the Program are treated as dual enrollees and cannot be charged fees for participation. Additionally, the bill allocates funds to USM for the development of the Program in Fiscal Years 2028 and 2029.

The State Board and MSDE support HB 479, which aims to strengthen the teacher pipeline in Southern Maryland by expanding early college and career pathways into the teaching profession, specifically in regions with ongoing workforce shortages. We endorse the bill's goal of creating structured, credit-bearing pathways that introduce high school students to teaching careers and align with the Blueprint for Maryland's Future. The State Board and MSDE value the emphasis on collaboration between local education agencies (LEAs), higher education institutions, and state partners, as well as the focus on rural and underrepresented students.

MSDE recognizes early college programs as key strategies to boost Maryland's educator workforce. While MSDE supports the effort to expand teacher pathways and dual enrollment opportunities, it is important to note that students in these three LEAs also have access to the Teacher Academy of Maryland (TAM), a CTE program run in partnership with Towson University designed for aspiring educators. As with all proposed initiatives, MSDE seeks to ensure that the early college program offers a distinct, non-duplicative opportunity for students.

Additionally, MSDE emphasizes the importance of a robust planning and implementation process to support the development of a high-quality early college program for aspiring educators. The planning period included in the bill provides an important opportunity for the agencies involved to clearly define roles and responsibilities, allowing each partner to contribute in alignment with its strengths. Meaningful engagement of MSDE, USM, MHEC, and participating LEAs throughout this process will be critical to successful implementation.

In order to implement the program as it is intended, capacity building will be key. MSDE believes that expanding both internal capacity and LEA capacity will be critical to the program's success. The Department's responsibilities under the bill include program management, standards development, regulatory oversight, professional learning, interagency coordination, communications, and data management. We look forward to continued discussions with the sponsors and other partners identified in the legislation to provide clarity regarding MSDE's role and the resources required to administer the program.

Please contact Laurel Cratsley, Interim Executive Director of Government Affairs, at [laurel.cratsley@maryland.gov](mailto:laurel.cratsley@maryland.gov), or Zach Hands, Executive Director of the State Board, at [zachary.hands1@maryland.gov](mailto:zachary.hands1@maryland.gov).