

Steve Whisler

President, Carroll County Board of Education
Maryland State Chairman, National School Boards Coalition
Former Maryland Public Schools Educator

IN SUPPORT OF HB 455

Madam Chair, Madam Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee:

I respectfully submit this testimony in strong support of HB 455.

As President of the Carroll County Board of Education, Maryland State Chairman of the National School Boards Coalition, and a former Maryland public schools educator, I have dedicated my career to improving educational outcomes for Maryland students. HB 455 represents responsible policy that expands opportunity while ensuring oversight and accountability.

HB 455 establishes clear guardrails for Scholarship Granting Organizations (SGOs). It requires the Maryland State Department of Education to approve and certify nonprofit organizations that meet defined statutory standards. It mandates annual reporting to the U.S. Secretary of the Treasury beginning in 2027. It requires the Comptroller to publish guidance to assist taxpayers in properly claiming the associated tax credit. These provisions ensure transparency, compliance, and responsible administration.

Beyond its administrative safeguards, HB 455 provides meaningful educational flexibility.

It helps families offset private school tuition costs. It supports families who remain enrolled in public schools but incur additional expenses for tutoring or supplemental academic services. And critically, it provides options for families whose children are assigned to public schools that have persistently struggled to meet performance expectations.

Parents do not choose their zoned public school. It is assigned based on residence. When a school repeatedly underperforms and families feel their children are not receiving the education they deserve, those parents should not be left without alternatives.

HB 455 gives those families a pathway to pursue a different environment or secure supplemental services to meet their child's needs.

It is reasonable to acknowledge that expanding educational options may result in some reduction in public school enrollment. However, public school funding is structured so that dollars follow students. Aligning funding with family choice ensures resources reflect actual enrollment and encourages systems to remain responsive to student needs.

Supporting HB 455 does not undermine public education. I lead a public school system and remain committed to strengthening it. At the same time, our first obligation is to students and families.

HB 455 expands opportunity, ensures nonprofit oversight, promotes transparency, and provides meaningful choice—particularly for families frustrated by persistently underperforming schools.

For these reasons, I respectfully request a favorable report.

Thank you for your consideration.

Steve Whisler