

Steve Whisler

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

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

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 803.

My name is Steve Whisler. I serve as President of the Carroll County Board of Education, Maryland's State Chairman of the National School Boards Coalition, and I am a former Maryland public school educator. I come before you today not only as an elected leader, but as someone who has worked inside our classrooms and understands both the promise and the practical realities of public education.

House Bill 803 is a necessary and responsible step forward.

Under current Blueprint mandates, Maryland is projected to hire approximately 15,000 additional educators statewide. That mandate may have been conceived under different fiscal conditions, but today we face:

- Declining student enrollment in just about every jurisdiction
- Reduced state revenue flowing to local education authorities (LEAs)
- Growing structural budget deficits
- Escalating costs for pensions, healthcare, and employee benefits

We cannot responsibly require a massive workforce expansion while enrollment declines and funding tightens.

In Carroll County and across Maryland, we are already navigating staffing challenges, recruitment shortages in critical subject areas, and competition with neighboring states. Simply mandating additional hires does not guarantee qualified candidates. In fact, it risks diluting the talent pool and stretching limited resources even thinner.

Beyond operating costs, we must confront a capital reality.

We lack sufficient capital funding to expand or modernize school facilities to accommodate thousands of new employees. Classrooms are not elastic. Educators deserve dedicated, functional workspaces. Without adequate construction funding:

- Schools will face overcrowded shared spaces
- Support staff will lack proper offices
- Instructional quality may suffer
- Local taxpayers may be forced to shoulder additional burdens

Blueprint implementation must align with demographic trends, fiscal sustainability, and facility capacity.

HB803 provides flexibility. It allows Maryland to recalibrate mandates to reflect current enrollment patterns, revenue realities, and local conditions. It preserves educational goals while recognizing that one-size-fits-all staffing ratios are neither efficient nor affordable in this environment.

As a former educator, I strongly support investing in students. As a board president responsible for balancing a half-billion-dollar local budget, I must also insist on fiscal responsibility and operational feasibility.

Supporting HB803 is not abandoning education reform. It is ensuring reform is sustainable.

Maryland can lead in academic excellence — but only if we align policy with practicality.

I respectfully urge a favorable report on House Bill 803.

Thank you.