

J Scott Smith: written testimony
House Ways and Means Committee

House Bill 479: Southern Maryland Early College Teacher Pathway Program and Program
Workgroup

February 11, 2026

Favorable

As we are all aware, Maryland is facing a critical shortage of qualified, licensed public school teachers, and traditional models of teacher preparation in Maryland have not been able to meet our needs. To demonstrate this, look no further than the six thousand conditionally licensed teachers leading our classrooms this year. In Southern Maryland alone, we have more than 500 conditional teachers. To become fully licensed, each of these must complete an approved MSDE program while working full-time. It is a daunting undertaking and requires determined persistence to navigate the available virtual programs. As a result, many conditionally licensed teachers are overwhelmed and leave the profession just as they are starting.

We have to change this.

We have come to the unshakable conclusion that we must grow our own. We must inspire our local students and staff to become teachers and then show them how it can be done - affordably, flexibly, and **LOCALLY**.

To this end, we've held a regional [Teacher Preparation Pipeline Summit](#) for the past two years and will do so for a third on April 24, 2026, at the University of Maryland Southern Maryland (USMSM) campus. Great work has come from this collaboration, such as Registered Teacher Apprentices, models for moving para educators to teachers, and in St. Mary's, an Early College Program for our Teacher Academy of Maryland (TAM) students to attend the College of Southern Maryland (CSM) and ultimately earn an Associate's in the Art of Teaching (AAT).

Unfortunately, once students or staff earn their AAT in Southern Maryland, there is no local option for an in-person Bachelor's degree. They must either leave us for a traditional university or enroll in a fully online virtual program. In both cases, we lose connection, and they lose support.

We need to keep our future teachers in Southern Maryland and support them all the way to the classroom. This can only be done by creating something new, something that harnesses the technology of the 21st-century, without losing the human, in-person, face-to-face community that is the bedrock of education.

I know that with the right stakeholders around a table, we can pioneer teacher preparation pathways in Southern Maryland that will become models for the state. For that reason, I support HB 479.