



The Senate of Maryland
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401-1991

SB 630 - Education - Adult High School Pilot Program - Funding and Grants

Testimony of Senate President Bill Ferguson

On March 30, 2021

Before the Appropriations Committee

Why This Bill Matters:

A high school diploma is increasingly a prerequisite for employment, postsecondary education, and access to industry-recognized trade certification training opportunities. However, a 2019 report by the U.S. Census Bureau estimates that 10% of Maryland's population over the age of 18 do not have a high school diploma, effectively limiting career pathways that would otherwise exist. In Baltimore City alone, it is estimated that an individual with a high school diploma or equivalent credential earns about \$7,000, or 33%, more per year than an individual without one.

This obvious mismatch between requisite educational attainment and postsecondary or employment opportunities led the Maryland General Assembly to pass Senate Bill 866/House Bill 1381 in 2017 to establish the Adult High School Pilot Program. The 2017 legislation authorized the licensing of six adult high schools throughout the State that are designed to provide a pathway for adults without a high school diploma to continue their education and work towards earning a secondary degree.

As noted by a recent report released by the Maryland Department of Labor and Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), the need for fully operational adult high schools has only become more urgent with the impacts of COVID-19, resulting economic hardship, and increased competition for employment. The report notes that, "[t]he disproportionate negative economic impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on adults in need of adult literacy, high school diplomas, and employment in Maryland underscores the imperative to protect and promote access to adult education resources such as those provided through the [Adult High School Pilot] Program."

Unfortunately, the two approved operators of Adult High School programs in Maryland have been unable to secure the necessary funding to open their respective schools and begin earnestly serving prospective students.

What This Bill Does:

As amended, Senate Bill 630 expands funding for the Adult High School Pilot Program by mandating a \$250,000 appropriation in FY2022 and encourages the use of federal funds for this purpose.

Further, the bill includes a \$250,000 appropriation in every year following FY22 for each approved operator to ensure they have the needed funding to serve potential students.

Why You Should Vote For This Bill:

At a time when the need for adult educational pathways is increasingly critical, Maryland should be doing everything possible to support Adult High School program operators who have already been approved and are ready to begin opening their doors to students. The Maryland Department of Labor and MSDE report referenced above also notes that securing philanthropic dollars for these programs has been difficult without public investment, but that is likely to change if the Maryland General Assembly passes Senate Bill 630.

Adult High Schools have the potential to provide high-quality secondary education and access to career training for an estimated 500,000 Maryland adults without a high school diploma. A robust curriculum has been developed and approved, and critical wraparound services have been identified to further support students. Now is the time for Maryland to take the next step and invest in these vital programs to get them from concept to operation.

Thank you for your consideration of Senate Bill 630 and I urge the committee to move this bill with a favorable report.