

March 15, 2021

SB 965- Blueprint for Maryland's Future - SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENT

Dear Chair Pinsky, Vice-Chair Kagan and Members of the Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committees,

The Maryland Out of School Time Network (MOST) is a statewide organization dedicated to closing opportunity gaps by expanding both the quantity and quality of afterschool and summer learning opportunities for school-aged young people. MOST is one of the fifty statewide networks supported by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation and serves as Maryland's affiliate to the National Afterschool Association. MOST serves on the Executive Committee of the Blueprint Coalition and is a longtime active member of the Maryland Education Committee. We also serve as the backbone organization for the Maryland Coalition for Community Schools (MD4CS).

The Blueprint for Maryland's Future will strengthen Maryland's commitment to excellence in education; however, fidelity of implementation and additional funding resources are critical to the bill's success. MOST & MD4CS appreciate the provisions of Senate Bill 965 which provide needed timetable corrections and clarifications to the Blueprint for Maryland's Future. We support the recommendations of the Maryland Education Coalition in their written testimony and would like to emphasize a few areas where Senate Bill 965 could be strengthened.

- We are thrilled that the General Assembly is focused on the importance of summer learning opportunities and strongly support the incorporation of school-community partnerships in providing activities with a "hands-on, minds-on" youth development approach. Though the legislation allows for funds to carry over in the case of under-spending, we would like to see an explicit commitment to apply any unused summer funding to afterschool programs taking place during the school year. The need for expanded learning time year-round was significant before the pandemic began and will continue to be an essential component of recovery moving forward.
- MOST and MD4CS appreciate the addition to the foundation to expand access to digital tools; however, we share other advocates' concern that the funds currently allocated in the foundation may not be sufficient to address all the costs schools require to meet COMAR requirements. Therefore, we strongly discourage amendments regarding the formula for compensatory and ELL programs and oppose decreases for special education, as these parts of the formula are the ways that inequities are addressed. We also support MEC's recommendation to convene a workgroup post-session to continue examining the real costs of requirements under COMAR and the Blueprint programs to ensure implementation fidelity.
- We recommend keeping the Concentration of Poverty grants at their original amount, creating more flexibility around the Health Practitioner role, and implementing a more rapid phase-in of

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the Concentration of Poverty per-pupil funding. These dollars are urgently needed to fully implement the Community School strategy at each school based on school needs assessment. Community School Coordinators are a valuable asset in and of themselves, but without resources to put strategic partnerships and services in place, the full impact of this investment will be delayed.

We hope the General Assembly will examine these issues and those raised by the Maryland Education Coalition to amend SB 965 and move it forward toward a successful conclusion before the end of the legislative session.

Sincerely,

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