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Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 937  
Grow Your Own Educators Grant Program - Established  
Education, Energy, and the Environment  
March 6, 2024  
1:00pm

**The Baltimore Teachers Union supports Senate Bill 0937**, and would like to express our strong support for the proposed legislation that aims to establish a Grow Your Own Program, providing financial support and mentoring to paraprofessionals and school-related personnel who aspire to become certified teachers.

The Baltimore Teachers Union represents 8,280 teachers, paraprofessionals, counselors, clinicians, librarians, secretaries, community school site specialists, bus transportation aides, and many more school-based and central office support staff. We are 4 out of 5 workers in Baltimore City Public Schools, serving 75,595 students and their families. Our national union, the American Federation of Teachers, represents over 1.7 million educators, healthcare workers, and public employees in the United States and its territories.

We commend the committee for addressing the critical issue of teacher shortages and recognizing the potential of paraprofessionals and school-related personnel to address this challenge through the Grow Your Own Program. Investing in the development of our dedicated education support professionals is an essential step towards ensuring a highly qualified and diverse teaching workforce for our students. In our educational system, we face numerous challenges, including a shortage of qualified teachers, particularly in underserved communities. Paraprofessionals and school-related personnel are often deeply rooted in their communities, possess invaluable experience, and understand the unique needs of the students they serve. However, barriers such as financial constraints and limited access to necessary support services hinder their transition to becoming certified teachers.

The proposed Grow Your Own Program offers a comprehensive solution to these challenges by providing financial assistance and essential support services to those who wish to pursue teacher certification. This program not only addresses the shortage of qualified educators but also fosters diversity within the teaching profession, as it encourages individuals from underrepresented groups to pursue teaching careers

- Scholarships and tuition assistance will make teacher certification programs more accessible to paraprofessionals and school-related personnel.
- Mentorship programs will connect aspiring educators with experienced teachers for guidance and support.
- Professional development opportunities will enhance their skills and prepare them for the challenges of the classroom.

- Access to counseling and academic advising services will ensure a smooth transition into the teaching profession.

We have seen success stories from similar programs implemented in other states, where paraprofessionals and school-related personnel have not only successfully obtained their teaching certifications but have also become effective and impactful educators. The Grow Your Own Program is a proven strategy to recruit, prepare, and retain high-quality teachers who are committed to their communities..

In conclusion, **the Baltimore Teachers Union strongly urges the committee to pass a favorable report on SB0937.** By investing in the professional growth of paraprofessionals and school-related personnel, we not only address the teacher shortage crisis but also contribute to the overall improvement of our education system.

Thank you for your time and dedication to the betterment of our education system. We are confident that the implementation of the Grow Your Own Program will have a lasting positive impact on our schools, students, and communities.

