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BILL: HB 1027

TITLE: Education - Primary and Secondary Schools - Alternative School Options
(Right to Learn Act)

DATE: February 21, 2024

POSITION: Unfavorable

COMMITTEE: House Ways and Means Committee

CONTACT: Mary Pat Fannon, Executive Director, PSSAM

The Public School Superintendents' Association of Maryland (PSSAM), on behalf of all twenty-four local school superintendents, **opposes HB 1027**.

This bill requires that on or before January 1 each year, each county board of education to provide certain information to the parents or legal guardians of students who attend a failing school; requiring a failing school to retain the failing school designation until the school receives a certain rating; requiring students who are attending a failing school to be provided the opportunity to attend an alternative school; establishing the Broadening Options and Opportunities for Students Today Program; etc.

In 2016, the BOOST program was created and established a \$5 million annual appropriation to provide vouchers for students who are eligible for the free or reduced-price lunch program to attend eligible nonpublic schools. PSSAM, along with our partners in education advocacy such as the Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) and the Maryland State Education Association (MSEA), has consistently opposed legislation to further codify the establishment of the BOOST program.

PSSAM does not believe that this legislation is needed to promote parental choice among the public and non-public schools in the State. Maryland enjoys a wide array of educational opportunities for all students, including a consistently high performing public education system and within several school systems, charter schools continue to grow at a rapid pace.

Unlike nonpublic and private schools, with the exception of nonpublic special education schools, Maryland public schools are held strictly accountable by local, State, and federal laws and regulations such as teacher education and certification, academic standards, and anti-discrimination laws. Local superintendents fully recognize that strong accountability measures for Maryland's 900,000 public school students translates into strong accountability for public dollars invested in education. In addition, it is important to note that public schools provide effective educational programs for all students, including

special education, English language learners, early childhood, and rigorous high school programs that are not always available in parochial and private schools.

PSSAM strongly emphasizes our concern in allocating public dollars to support nonpublic programs that are not regulated under the same standards as public programs. We strongly urge the committee to consider the serious economic, constitutional, legal, and public policy consequences of the existing BOOST program, as well as any proposals to increase public funds to its operations as outlined in this legislation. PSSAM strongly opposes the establishment of a permanent funding stream that would ultimately finance private schools. The financial needs of our public-school students must take priority over those who choose a private or parochial education.

For these reasons, PSSAM strongly **opposes HB 1027** and urges an **unfavorable** committee report.