



BARRY GLASSMAN

HARFORD COUNTY EXECUTIVE

10/15/2019

Dr. William E. Kirwan

Chair

The Blueprint for Maryland's Future Funding Formula Workgroup,
State of Maryland Commission on Innovation and Excellence on Education
c/o Department of Legislative Services, Office of Policy Analysis
90 State Circle
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Dr. Kirwan

I write, as a member of the Formula Funding Workgroup, to raise my concerns with the process and projections currently before the Workgroup. While I appreciate the opportunity to serve, and to represent the county community to the best of my ability, I feel I am unable to adequately represent a simple "county perspective" for a final vote. Given the extremely short time that members and stakeholders have been able to see the practical effects of the many policy changes being contemplated, and the looming uncertainty regarding many embedded assumptions of the cost drivers, I am left without a clear course of action.

I applaud the extensive work of the staff and consultants to the Workgroup, and to the Commission. They have worked diligently to provide information to our body, and have been responsive to our many requests. I know I personally had raised questions regarding pension costs accompanying the various direct personnel costs in the models – they worked to develop a substantial series of assumptions and forecasts to better incorporate that cost, which had been missing from previous estimates. Their work has been essential to our progress.

However, even with their tireless efforts, Workgroup members only received a first look at the State and local effects of the model on October 8. And even as those estimates were being discussed for the first time – merely a week before final decisions were scheduled – the Workgroup members were engaging in earnest and substantive debate about making major changes to them. While I have tried to gain input from others across the county community to assess their local fiscal impacts, we have clearly only had cost estimates for a matter of days and those are merely in a preliminary draft document with further changes virtually certain.

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My selection to serve on the Workgroup is not completely separable from my role as President of the Maryland Association of Counties. I bear a responsibility to reflect a view broader than just my own jurisdiction, and my own tenure as its chief elected official. I have no reasonable ability to synthesize a simple “yes or no” on behalf of Maryland’s many counties – who are obviously affected in dramatically different ways by the week-old draft projections.

This concern is compounded by the fact that many of the Commission’s and Workgroup’s operating assumptions about cost drivers appear uncertain, or outright rosy. Calculating the direct costs of advancing the newest teacher salaries is incorporated in the models, but the obvious practical “compression” effect on teachers just above those thresholds does not seem to be fully captured. Further, the ripple effects on other bargaining units, both within and outside the school system, does not seem to be reflected. These are real consequences of such bold salary actions, and if not incorporated properly into the State’s formulas, the unanticipated costs could be fully borne by county budgets.

Caseload assumptions present a similar concern. The working models assume an aggressive drop in the number of students in special, cost-driving categories. I think the Commission members and the Workgroup members would join many stakeholders in hoping this proves true – but the assumption that these caseloads will fall so dramatically is not a certainty. If they do not, then each forecast in the progression of the multi-year phase-in is inherently too optimistic, leaving the real costs of the statutory commitments well above the stated projections. The Workgroup has not received detailed information regarding the “cost overlaps” and “repurposed funds” as a means to bring the overall expense of this program down, but again – if those do not fully bear fruit as forecasted, the cost burdens on both state and local budgets could exceed the numbers before us.

Counties expect to remain a central part of the continued discussions on this endeavor, as the full partner they are in funding Maryland’s education commitment. In the months ahead for the full Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education, and then before the General Assembly, I expect counties will gain a deeper appreciation for both the projected fiscal impacts and the certainty of their underlying assumptions. This may guide a still-evolving county consensus. As a county leader, I expect to remain a part of that constructive conversation, even after my tenure as a Workgroup member lapses.

On behalf of county governments, and my own sense of the material presented to the Workgroup, I feel I am unable to cast a clear vote regarding the far-reaching and indefinite proposal being developed in these final days of our work.

With every good wish, I remain

Very truly yours,



Barry Glassman
Harford County Executive

CC: Kirwan Funding Formula Workgroup
Michael Sanderson, Executive Director, MACo