



House Bill 770

Publicly Funded Full-Day Prekindergarten Program - Tier I Child - Alteration of Definition

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**
WITH AMENDMENTS

To: Ways and Means Committee

Date: February 22, 2023

From: Brianna January

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS HB 770 WITH AMENDMENTS**. The bill as drafted would place a costly mandate on school systems and county governments to expedite the phased-in expansion of certain categorizations of three- and four-year-olds to fully publicly-subsidized Tier 1 pre-K. Counties suggest amendments that would require state funding to fully support this accelerated phase-in of students to these programs.

Currently, the Blueprint for Maryland's Future law ("The Blueprint") provides a phased-in approach to expanding Tier 1 pre-K, allowing county boards of education and local governments – as fiduciary partners – appropriate time to plan for doing so. Current law would extend the Tier I definition to include three- and four-year olds with disabilities, experiencing homelessness, and from non-English speaking homes for FY25. HB 770 would eliminate this phase-in and would count these children for the coming year, FY24, meaning effects on the State budget plan already proposed, but also for county budgets already amidst preparation.

MACo recognizes the enthusiasm to implement universal pre-K and hasten the important early education pillar of The Blueprint. However, doing so would potentially place a costly mandate on school systems and county governments to carry out this expedited state policy ahead of the previously agreed upon phase-in schedule of The Blueprint. Furthermore, HB 770 would presumably go into effective after counties have made substantial progress developing – or even have already approved – their budgets. This would require counties to revisit capital and operating responsibilities and potentially force county boards of education to renegotiate contracts for the upcoming school year.

Were the Committee to agree to expedite the expansion of Tier 1 pre-K eligibility, counties believe the bill should ensure that the State pays the full share of the public subsidies for the additional Tier 1 students added under the bill. Without State support, counties would have no choice but to fund this unplanned mandate. Accordingly, MACo urges a report of **FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS** for HB 770.