



POSITION STATEMENT

TESTIMONY PRESENTED TO THE SENATE EDUCATION, HEALTH, AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

SENATE BILL 683 – STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION – NEXT GENERATION SCHOOLS –ESTABLISHED

**DONALD C. FRY
PRESIDENT & CEO
GREATER BALTIMORE COMMITTEE**

POSITION: Support

The Greater Baltimore Committee (GBC) is a non-partisan, independent, regional business advocacy organization comprised of hundreds of businesses -- large, medium and small -- educational institutions, nonprofit organizations and foundations located in Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Carroll, Harford, and Howard counties as well as Baltimore City. The GBC is a 60-year-old, private-sector membership organization with a rich legacy of working with government to find solutions to problems that negatively affect our competitiveness and viability. It is an organization that prides itself on advocating for changes in public policies that strengthen the business climate while improving the quality of life in the region.

The Greater Baltimore Committee supports Senate Bill 683 – State Board of Education – Next Generation Schools – Established.

One of the most important and sacred responsibilities of every parent is ensuring that their child receives a top-notch education, one that will adequately prepare them to be successful in a technology-driven, competitive 21st century economy. Traditionally, for grades K-12 this education is funded by the state and local governments and administered through local education agencies in each county. In most instances, the school that a child attends is determined by where the family resides and there is not a great deal of flexibility in this process.

The challenge behind such residency-based schooling resides in the fact that this traditional model tends to create schools that are racially and socioeconomically segregated, putting lower income students at a serious disadvantage. There is a multitude of research showing that in the United States, schools with a high concentration of students from low-income families do not perform as well as their higher income counterparts, partially due to a scarcity of resources and a lack of highly-qualified teachers. According to a report by The Century Foundation, in 2009 more than one-half of fourth and eighth graders who attended high-poverty schools failed the national reading test, compared to fewer than one in five students from the same grade levels who attended low-poverty schools.

In recent years there has been a massive movement behind “school choice” – the idea that parents should have the freedom to choose the type of education their child receives and where that education should take place. In Maryland, parents are provided this opportunity through the 47 charter schools located in five counties throughout the state.

Senate Bill 683 seeks to add five new charter schools in Maryland with a special focus on integration and innovative teaching models, such as experience- or research-based education. The proposed legislation would create schools that are much more diverse than currently operated charter schools by requiring that the percentage of students receiving free or reduced meals is no less than 35% and no more than 55%. By ensuring this level of diversity, this proposed legislation aims to reduce the achievement gap between students from different socioeconomic background by providing low-income students the opportunity to receive a better education than they might otherwise receive.

Increasing the diversity of Maryland’s schools is beneficial to our students and to our state as a whole. Learning in a diverse environment has proven to have many educational and personal benefits for all the students involved, perhaps none more important than providing students with the skills to succeed down the road in an increasingly diverse workforce.

For the reasons stated above, the Greater Baltimore Committee urges a favorable report of Senate Bill 683.

GREATER BALTIMORE COMMITTEE

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