

House Bills 453 & 1343-Maryland Education Credit and House Bill 1213-BOAST

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Supporting House Bills 453 & 706 does not support students first. It supports wealthy institutions, people and businesses who are looking for a tax break at the expense of our public schools, students and staff. Therefore, any suggestion otherwise, is often misleading and fails to meet the needs of over 870,000 public school students from Allegheny to Wicomico County and every public school system in between.

Article VIII of the Maryland Constitution is a mandate to the General Assembly for Public Schools, but **it does not mandate funding for the maintenance of private, parochial or home schools by taxation or otherwise.** Many non-public education institutions that may benefit from any of these proposed bills also promote exclusiveness, not inclusiveness as embraced by our public schools for the over 400,000 economic disadvantaged, 65,000 Limited English and 98,000 Special Needs students statewide. **These bills do not prevent all discrimination.**

House Bill 1213 appears on the surface to be a compromise, but it is also found to be lacking mandates or benefits for public schools, its students and staff. In addition, it has a \$50 million fiscal note, while the Governor is holding \$68 million in GCEI funds allocated for 13 of the 24 Maryland Public School Systems. This cost them hundreds of jobs!

These bills also list the Department of Commerce, not Education as the administrator. This agency is responsible for Business and Industry Sector Development, Division of Marketing & Communications and Tourism, Film and the Arts. **They have no defined role on education issues and put business issues before education and others.**

Since Bridge for Excellence Act of 2002 was passed, all of the goals have not been fully achieved or maintained thoroughly or efficiently throughout Maryland's public school system. Although our public schools statewide have made significant improvements with a number one ranking nationally for 5 years in a row, the ranking has been number four, the past two years, with signs it may go lower while enrollment grows rapidly with a more diverse student population.

As a result of Bridge for Excellence, all Maryland School systems must submit an annual Master Plan update to MSDE to review and report to the General Assembly. These master plans must include their budgets tied to goals, objectives and outcomes including how they spent federal, state and local funding and the results.

House Bills 453, 1343 and 1213 do not require any real reporting or master plans to the state comparable to what is required of all public school systems; even less accountability for how public money is spent or their outcomes with no reasonable hope that most are willing to open up their books for review by MSDE or the General Assembly.

There are also long standing concerns about discrimination of all sorts including by income, race, gender or academic ability and the Special Needs community has a long list of questionable actions by multiple non-public schools not allowed to be even considered by a public school. Many of them appear to be systematic.

There are also frequent reports that behavior and discipline policies are highly restrictive and inflexible for students and staff resulting in some being removed often without cause with no appeal processes.

The General Assembly should see if there is a real need or is this request to support their decreasing enrollment or revenue, while local public school systems and governments have similar request? If so, could this need be considered to be a bail out, when public school systems with similar decreases often receive nothing?

If it is a scholarship program, who do the scholarships go to? Are they going to the gifted athlete or student, so their education institution can recruit from public schools and promote their image? How do they perform academically?

Are they going to economically disadvantaged students, so they can also receive Title 1 funds needed for the local public school that is attached to strict reporting and accountability, family/community involvement, etc.? If so, **where is the evidence they are receiving a better education and student services?**

Lastly, **for those receiving public funds for textbooks, computers, etc. - what are they being used for and what assurances do we have that they are only used as defined in law and not for other non-permitted uses?** How do we know? Does the state provide additional funding to monitor and audit these uses with punitive options? Why?

Finally, **public funds must only go to public schools,** not just because it is public money, but because they have a reporting and accountability system and are not allowed to discriminate. They educate all regardless to who they are. Why should any public money go to any institution, contractor or other entity that does not?

This is why we believe you must vote unfavorable for House Bills 453, 1213 and 1343. 870,000 plus kids count on it.