

ANNE ARUNDEL COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION

2644 Riva Road, Annapolis, Maryland 21401

TITLE: Education – Prekindergarten Students - Funding

BILL NUMBER: SB 461

POSITION: SUPPORT

HEARING DATE: February 24, 2016

COMMITTEE: Budget and Taxation

CONTACT PERSON: Jessica S. Cuches, Esq. 410-224-8561

The Anne Arundel County Board of Education **SUPPORTS** Senate Bill 461. The expansion of prekindergarten programs is a high priority for our school system because investments in early literacy and prekindergarten education are absolutely essential to efforts to close and eliminate achievement gaps. This is especially critical for our students who face challenges that are not of their own making, but which, nonetheless, can be barriers to academic success. As a school system we are continually exploring ways to expand prekindergarten opportunities for students, but as with any system with limited funding and many needs, we cannot expand these programs as much as we want or as much as we need.

We currently absorb the cost of roughly 2,000 prekindergarten students (1,300 full-time equivalent, or FTE) without per-pupil funding for these students given the fact that prekindergarten students are not included in the annual enrollment counts for State and local education aid. We support full per-pupil funding allocations for students attending prekindergarten without any offsetting reduction in compensatory education funding.

Senate Bill 461 would make eligible children enrolled either in a part-time or full-time prekindergarten program part of the overall FTE count for State aid and County funding purposes beginning in FY2018. Because one of the barriers to expanding opportunities for prekindergarten enrollment has been lack of funding of the program, funds provided by this Bill would go far to ensure that more children are prepared for kindergarten. If passed, this Bill would increase our FTE enrollment by roughly 1,300 students, and general fund revenues to Anne Arundel County Public Schools from the State and County would increase by a combined \$15 million to \$20 million in FY2018.

This Bill provides school systems with a means to support and expand prekindergarten programs, ultimately providing equity and educational opportunities to students in need. All students deserve the best we can offer them. They deserve an opportunity to excel and not start kindergarten behind their peers because of their circumstances. This Bill is a step in that direction, as it provides school systems with much-needed funding to support their youngest learners and provide quality prekindergarten programs for qualified students.

Accordingly, the Anne Arundel County Board of Education urges the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee to issue a **FAVORABLE** Report on Senate Bill 461.