

BILL: Senate Bill 913
TITLE: Publicly Funded Full-Day Prekindergarten Program - Tier I Child -
Alteration of Definition
DATE: March 7, 2023
POSITION: SUPPORT
COMMITTEE: Education, Energy, and the Environment
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The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) supports Senate Bill 913 which is needed to correct a provision of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future Act that defines and directs prekindergarten funding. Specifically, the law's definition of a Tier I prekindergarten student incorrectly failed to include four-year olds who are disabled, English learners, or experiencing homelessness.

The Blueprint clearly intended to include these students, regardless of household income, in the definition of Tier I students. MABE, therefore, greatly appreciates that this is an emergency bill with direct impact on the student enrollment count and requisite funding for the 2023-2024 school year.

The Blueprint establishes the Publicly Funded Full-Day Prekindergarten Program to guarantee the availability of slots in public schools or private facilities at no cost for three-year-olds and four-year-olds from families with incomes up to 300% of the federal poverty level (FPL) (\$74,580 for a family of three in 2023) and for four-year-olds from families with incomes between 300% and 600% FPL using a sliding scale (Md. Code Ann., Ed. Art. § 7-1A-01).

All three and four year old children from families with incomes of 300% or less of the federal poverty level (FPL) are defined as Tier I children who are eligible for access to free public or private full-day prekindergarten programs. For funding purposes, the law defines these students as enrolled students beginning in FY 2023 (2022-2023 school year). Beginning in FY 2025 (2024-2025 school year) Tier II children, from families with incomes between 300% and 600%, also become eligible for funding as enrolled students (Md. Code Ann., Ed. Art. § 5-229). However, the availability of slots for eligible children is a function of the availability of slots in public and private programs that meet eligibility criteria and thereby qualify for approval and funding.

The prekindergarten expansion envisioned by the Blueprint is an enormous undertaking involving short and long-term planning to address staffing full-day programs with highly qualified teachers and aides, and planning, designing and constructing the major renovations and new prekindergarten classrooms and facilities. Senate Bill 913 is critically important to ensure that all students intended to benefit from these efforts are able to do so with the support of the clearly defined state and local funding.

For these reasons, MABE urges a favorable report on Senate Bill 913.