

**BILL:** House Bill 428  
**TITLE:** Community Schools - Rental Assistance for Community School Families Program and Fund - Establishment  
**DATE:** March 26, 2024  
**POSITION:** SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS  
**COMMITTEE:** Budget and Taxation  
Education, Energy, and the Environment  
**CONTACT:** John R. Woolums, Esq.

The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) supports the successful development of community schools as a core component of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future. The Blueprint provides significant funding to support the planning and operation of community schools in neighborhoods with high concentrations of poverty. The Blueprint law defines a community school as a public school that establishes a set of strategic partnerships between the school and other community resources that promote student achievement, positive learning conditions, and the well-being of students, families, and the community by providing wraparound services. In this context, MABE also supports the intent of House Bill 428 to establish a rental assistance program within the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) to support families of students attending community schools.

However, as introduced and currently drafted, local school systems are very concerned that the bill appears to require community school coordinators to "facilitate direct payments" for rent, utilities, and other expenses to eligible households. Our community school coordinators are already heavily burdened by an extraordinarily broad scope of responsibilities for the facilitation of wraparound services for students and families. MABE believes this bill provision is far too prescriptive because it would impose a major new responsibility on each coordinator to not only facilitate but also administer direct payments to households this new rental assistance program.

Specifically, on page 7, in lines 9-11, the bill would require each local community school coordinator to "identify eligible student households and facilitate direct payments." Again, MABE does not believe administering a rental assistance payment program should be added to the responsibilities of our community schools coordinators. MABE greatly appreciates that the bill sponsors have agreed to an amendment to clarify that the coordinator's role should be defined as "liaison" and that this role should be further defined by the local school system.

**(F) THE COMMUNITY SCHOOLS COORDINATOR MAY BE THE SCHOOL-BASED LIAISON FOR THE PROGRAM, IN ACCORDANCE WITH LOCAL SCHOOL SYSTEM POLICIES AND PROCEDURES [IDENTIFY ELIGIBLE STUDENT HOUSEHOLDS AND FACILITATE DIRECT PAYMENTS IN ACCORDANCE WITH SUBSECTION (E) OF THIS SECTION].**

MABE believes that this amendment better reflects the role of the coordinator, whose specific responsibilities are governed by their local school system's community school needs assessment and plan. MABE looks forward to each school system's ongoing collaboration with DHCD in support of the new rental assistance program to be created by House Bill 428.

For these reasons, MABE requests a favorable report on House Bill 428 with an amendment to ensure an appropriate role for the community school coordinator.