

President Ferguson
State House, H-107
100 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401

Speaker Jones
State House, H-101
100 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401

Business and Civic Leaders We Must Override the Veto of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future

We are leaders whose lives have been committed to building the economy and providing jobs for Marylanders. Maryland employers and employees must compete with companies across the United States and the world. An increasingly competitive economy requires a world-class education system.

Even before COVID, such a system did not exist in Maryland. The Blueprint for Maryland's Future was urgently needed then. The impact of COVID on our schools and on our economy is raising the stakes dramatically, making the Blueprint significantly more imperative.

Before COVID, as you know,

- Only 40% of our high school graduates were considered college and career ready. The standard for such readiness was English literacy at the 10th grade level and being able to pass an Algebra I exam, both low standards.
- On the National Assessment of Education Progress exams, as a state, we performed in the middle of the fifty states. On a global scale, the U.S. performed in the middle of developed countries. In other words, Maryland's education system produced students performing at a mediocre level in a nation in which students perform at a mediocre level.
- Maryland does an even poorer job with students who are racial minorities, students from low-income households, students with disabilities and students who are English language learners at a time when such student populations have grown to represent more than half of all the students in Maryland.
- 40% of all teachers leave the profession before year five.

You passed the Blueprint because you know these and many other similar facts.

COVID makes the Blueprint even more urgent.

- Beating COVID, reopening effective schools and restoring the economy are inextricably connected.
- Learning loss, especially with our most vulnerable students, a special emphasis of the Blueprint, has soared. The Blueprint makes clear our intention to dramatically change education practice, accountability, funding and outcomes, not just limp back into school buildings.
- Our educators, who are emerging as the newest group of essential workers, are under tremendous strain as they enter a brand new world. We not only need to provide COVID related supports, but the special message the Blueprint sends them will tell them that we really believe in their transformative work and the role of educator is held in high esteem in Maryland.

We recognize that it is not possible to simply override the veto and move forward as if nearly a year had not passed and revenue is not affected. The override of the Blueprint legislation will need to be accompanied by companion legislation that addresses both the timetable and the possibility of revenue shortfall.

We strongly urge the following legislative action:

- Override the veto at the earliest possible time with all components intact, preserving the systemic character of the changes contained within it.
- Maintain full funding of all components, adjusting the implementation as necessary, but altering as little as absolutely required so that the economic prosperity that will accompany the Blueprint may proceed accordingly.
- Commit the state to full program change and full funding, making clear your understanding that the Blueprint will not work if treated as a “pick and choose” menu.
- Approach funding responsibly by providing whatever levers deemed responsible yet ambitious to respond to unknown revenue estimates such as the provision in the Blueprint known as the “King Amendment” which allows for the pausing of implementation until the state regains solid financial footing should revenue significantly miss projections.
- With every change, ask the question, “does this change contribute to or distract from the state’s commitment to equity, the foundation stone of the constitutional guarantee of a thorough and efficient system of education?”

In the Blueprint, we have a ‘shovel-ready,” unprecedented plan to change the quality of life in Maryland and support the economy. During your tenure in leadership, you will likely not encounter another generation defining opportunity to create the future. We stand ready to be of assistance in any way that would be helpful.

Sincerely,

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Partner in Charge
Venable LLP Baltimore.

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Founder/Principal
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