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"Preparing Students for Success in the Skills-Based Economy"
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Introduction

Chairman Bean, Ranking Member Bonamici, and distinguished Members of the Committee, it is an honor to testify before you today. My name is Richard Kincaid, and I lead the Office of College and Career Pathways at the Maryland State Department of Education, also known as MSDE. My team and I are responsible for ensuring that all students, especially those who are historically under-represented, have access to high quality Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs which include the opportunity to earn an industry-recognized credential, postsecondary credit, and participate in a work-based learning experience such as apprenticeship. Maryland is dedicated to enhancing access and equity in CTE programs, ensuring diverse and historically underserved students can equally benefit from comprehensive career pathways. The state is committed to preventing systemic tracking by offering flexible and inclusive CTE options that honor each student's unique choices and potential, rather than assigning tracks based on background or academic history.

For too long, both college and career have been treated as a destination for students. In Maryland, we are changing the narrative: career is *the* destination, and college, internship, national service, military service, and apprenticeships are some of the many pathways to get there.

To foster meaningful policy discussion and to support national benchmarking against programs that work and are working - today, I want to first, introduce you to a piece of groundbreaking legislation, known as the Blueprint for Maryland's Future; second, I want to

share with you a highly competitive grant program named Maryland Works, which brings together school systems and intermediary partners to develop a career-connected ecosystem; and third, I want to emphasize the importance of rigor, quality, and cross-sector collaboration in the apprenticeship space, and ensuring our decisions are responsive to and influenced by local, regional, and state workforce needs.

#1: Blueprint for Maryland's Future

The Blueprint for Maryland's Future is a significant shift in the state's approach to education policy, governance, and accountability. This multi-billion-dollar state and local investment intends to transform Maryland's public education system into a world-class education model. The Blueprint comprehensively spans various education policy areas, including early childhood education and teacher career pathways. For the purpose of my testimony today, I'll highlight Pillar 3 of the Blueprint, which requires all students have equitable access to rigorous education that prepares them for college, career, and life—and more specifically to our work in CTE, mandates that all high school graduates earn an industry-recognized credential and/or completes the high school level of a registered apprenticeship program by the 2030-31 school year. This mandate requires a rapid, statewide scaling of industry-aligned apprenticeship opportunities both on the industry side, and in our schools.

To achieve this, Maryland has implemented various strategies, including significant investment in expanding and improving CTE programs. Pillar 3 of the Blueprint parallels the intentionality of the Biden Administration's Four Keys to Unlock Career Success: dual enrollment, work-based learning, workforce credentials, and career advising and navigation via career counselors--each of these elements becoming a critical element of Maryland CTE redesign over the next few years. To seed and scale the apprenticeship and industry-recognized

credential elements of the Blueprint, MSDE recently launched a grant program called Maryland Works.

#2: Maryland Works

Maryland Works is a highly competitive MSDE-developed grant opportunity that leverages remaining one-time American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School Relief Funds, known as ESSER III, to make a substantial investment in establishing an industry-aligned apprenticeship infrastructure for all Maryland's schools and business sectors that will last.

The Maryland Works grant allocates $12.2 million to nine entities, including six local education agencies and three intermediaries, showcasing a national model for using recovery funds to build a talent pipeline in key workforce sectors. This initiative creates career paths for high school students leading to family-sustaining wages. It emphasizes innovative transportation, unique high-school scheduling, and diverse youth apprenticeships in career fields not traditionally associated with apprenticeship: finance, IT, biotechnology, life sciences, and education. Additionally, Maryland Works broadens traditional apprenticeships in construction, hospitality, and healthcare.

Does it work? In the last 90 days, the state of Maryland has almost doubled the number of students in youth apprenticeships. Both large government agencies like the National Security Agency and NASA are hiring Maryland youth apprentices alongside small rural businesses like Westminster Automotive, all who recognize the value-add our programs and apprenticeships bring to economic development. The State of Maryland and our apprentices will be ready to serve Maryland's future economic demand, and that of the nation's, as our state serves as one of five Workforce Hubs designated by the White House to quickly mobilize jobs and provide multiple opportunities to up-skill and re-skill our labor force.

#3: **Ensuring Rigor, Quality, and Cross-Sector Collaboration in the Apprenticeship Space**

In Maryland, the landscape of youth apprenticeship is evolving dynamically, shaped by the ambitious goals of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future and the innovative approaches of programs like Apprenticeship Maryland and School-to-Apprenticeship (STA) initiatives. These efforts are guided by a shared vision of equipping high school students with practical, career-oriented skills that align with the state's workforce needs.

The Blueprint's goals underline the state's commitment to creating pathways that lead to good jobs, and Apprenticeship Maryland is a significant component of this effort, offering a framework that integrates academic and practical learning, and requires 450 hours of on-the-job experience. Historically, this program focuses on juniors and seniors, primarily in the fields of Manufacturing, STEM, and traditional trades. It allows students to "earn and learn," gaining valuable work experience while being compensated. Following a similar route to approval as a Registered Apprenticeship, Apprenticeship Maryland opportunities must be paid, aligned with the student's career pathway, must include concurrent and ongoing related instruction, and must be approved by the Maryland Apprenticeship Training Council. Future youth apprenticeship programs must broaden their focus beyond traditional trades and STEM fields, encompassing a wider range of industries. The STA model can address these scalability needs and provide the additional benefit of creating seamless transitions from school to the workforce.

Regardless of the specific model of apprenticeship that's developed and implemented, several quality assurance elements must be in place:

1. Collaboration among industry partners, educational institutions, and government agencies. Educational partners, such as local school systems, community colleges,

and universities, play a pivotal role in curriculum development and alignment with academic standards. They ensure that the apprenticeship programs not only provide practical skills relevant to industry needs but also adhere to educational standards that facilitate seamless integration with traditional academic pathways.

2. A review board to formally approve the apprenticeship. In Maryland, the Apprenticeship and Training Council (MATC) plays a crucial role in approving and overseeing all apprenticeship programs, including youth apprenticeships, ensuring they meet established standards of quality and effectiveness.
3. Continuous evaluation of the apprenticeship program and individual experiences. Programs must be subject to ongoing review and adjustment, incorporating feedback from students, educators, and industry partners to maintain relevance and quality.

Conclusion

In closing, I want to thank each of you for making the commitment to develop meaningful national policy that strengthens career and technical education, industry-recognized credentials, and apprenticeship programs for the youth of our country. Our work in Maryland is both exciting and critical as we collectively work to prepare all students for success in the skills-based economy. We are eager to lead and to be a partner in that broader national effort – from which we and our children all stand to benefit.

I am now happy to answer any questions you may have.