

House Bill 1215, as originally introduced, sought to increase the maximum principal amount of bonds outstanding issued by the Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners. The House of Delegates passed the bill in its original form without amendments and sent the bill to the Senate. After the State Board of Education meeting on March 29, where the Board voted to restructure 11 severely failing middle and high schools in the Baltimore City Public School System, the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee drastically amended the bill in one day and sent the bill to the Senate floor for a full vote absent any substantive public deliberation by parents, students, teachers, advocates, the State Board of Education and the State Department of Education. The Maryland General Assembly disregarded the normal and long established legislative procedures that are in place to ensure adequate discussion of legislation by interested stakeholders and experts. Ironically, the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee actually held its hearing on this matter with a similar bill after House Bill 1215 was passed by the General Assembly and presented to my office.

In its current form, House Bill 1215, which may violate the Constitution of Maryland and other laws, would prohibit the State Board of Education and the State Superintendent of Schools from implementing badly needed restructuring efforts in Baltimore City public schools until May 30, 2007. The major restructuring efforts referenced in the bill include changes to a school's governance, such as removing a school from the control of the Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners. Specifically, the bill blocks or delays the actions taken last month by the State Board of Education to improve Baltimore City schools. Implementation of this bill will circumvent the authority of the Maryland State Board of Education, lock children into a failed system, and may jeopardize \$171 Million in federal funding for all of Maryland's local school systems.

I am deeply concerned that House Bill 1215 would delay the urgent help we must deliver to the principals, teachers and children in these schools. The State Board of Education's actions, particularly for the 11 high schools and middle schools, are critical and must begin as soon as possible since the current ninth graders and all of the middle school students must pass the High School Assessments in order to receive Maryland High School diplomas. Students graduating in the spring of 2009 will be the first to be affected by the requirements, and unfortunately, the pass rates for the four identified Baltimore City high schools and the seven identified middle schools are not at all hopeful. Lead-time is critical in helping implement a viable curriculum and strong instruction to abate the current tide of failures.

The State Board of Education's actions at its March 29 meeting resulted from the rejection of the Baltimore City Master Plan Update in December. Baltimore City's Master Plan Update was the only one of the 24 school systems' plans that was rejected. The system was asked to rewrite the Update and resubmit it in March with a promise to review the Update and respond as soon as possible. This Update was designed to guide the system for the current 2005-2006 school year. The Maryland State Board of Education found that the rewritten Update was better, but unrealistic and helped identify many problems organizationally and programmatically in the system. The Master Plan is required for a school system to receive the additional Thornton dollars. In Baltimore City's case, this represents \$200 million over five