



Mary Pat Fannon, Executive Director

BILL: Senate Bill 664 – Education – High School Graduation Requirements – Applications for Student Financial Aid
DATE: February 25, 2021
POSITION: **Oppose**
COMMITTEE: Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
CONTACT: Mary Pat Fannon, Executive Director

Senate Bill 664 requires that to graduate from a Maryland public high school, beginning the 2022-2023 school year, a student must consult with a high school guidance counselor or other representative regarding certain financial aid applications. This bill authorizes that a student can still graduate without meeting this requirement if they, or their legal guardian if a minor, submit a statement to their county board of education detailing their choice to opt out.

The Public School Superintendents' Association of Maryland (PSSAM), which represents all twenty-four local school superintendents, **opposes Senate Bill 664**.

PSSAM believes that this legislation is an onerous requirement on local school systems at this time. Schools need to be laser focused on meeting the social and emotional needs of our teachers, students, and families today more than ever. Each mental health professional in Maryland's schools, including guidance counselors, must remain focused on these important needs as we return to in-person learning after such a challenging year. Guidance counselors are already serving more students than intended as the current ratio in Maryland public high schools is 396 to 1, while the recognized acceptable level is 250 to 1. PSSAM is hesitant to divert any mental health professional's attention currently or the near future. The superintendents anticipate that each high school would need to hire at least one new guidance counselor to best fulfill the requirement of this bill.

The Blueprint for Maryland's Future, which was overridden and became law, directs new funds to additional guidance counselors (especially with 10th grade college and career readiness assessment) and mental health services. These additional funds will help relieve some of our current counselor shortages and help us meet the needs of our students without additional legislation.

It is already standard practice of each school system to provide assistance to students and families regarding college applications and maneuvering the FAFSA. PSSAM remains hesitant about making this a universal graduation requirement in the state as we are skeptical about our ability to meet the requirements of the bill and reach every student and their family, even if it is just to sign a piece of paper saying that they are opting out.

One Voice, One Vision for Maryland's Students

For the reasons stated above, PSSAM opposes Senate Bill 664 and urges an unfavorable committee report.