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Oral and Written Testimony—Oppose

Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

Senate Bill 638 (*Teachers and Teacher Preparation Programs— Research-Based Reading Instruction*)

February 28, 2018

Thank you for the opportunity to share our concerns about *Senate Bill 638 (Teachers and Teacher Preparation Programs—Research-Based Reading Instruction)* on behalf of the Maryland Association of Community Colleges, Maryland Independent College and University Association, Morgan State University, St. Mary's College of Maryland, and the University System of Maryland. Collectively, we represent the 23 four-year and 16 two-year teacher preparation programs in Maryland. While we strongly agree with supporting effective preparation in research-based reading instruction for all PreK-12 teacher candidates in Maryland, we disagree with the specific approach taken in this legislation. Senate Bill 638 would require a written test of research-based reading instruction for all Maryland candidates for a certificate to teach prekindergarten through sixth grade, students with disabilities, and English language learners, as well as reading specialists and reading teachers. This legislation would also require the Professional Standards and Teacher Education Board (PSTEB) and the State Board of Education to jointly set a passing score for teacher candidates and to set new standards for the delivery of research-based reading instruction among the State's teacher preparation programs.

The bill in its current form assumes that there are no literacy-related standards governing teacher preparation courses or programs in the State. This is not the case. Reading standards for teacher preparation programs have been adopted by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) in consultation with PSTEB, within the much broader context of literacy and reading standards for all children PK-12. Standards for reading instruction for all State approved elementary and secondary teacher preparation programs were enacted in 1999. These standards were then reviewed and revised in 2004. The standards are currently under formal review again, with extensive involvement from the Maryland higher education community and other stakeholders, including PSTEB, elementary and secondary educators, reading specialists, curriculum specialists, and organizations including Maryland Right to Read and Decoding Dyslexia Maryland. This review and revision process has been ongoing for two years and is expected to conclude later this year. All teacher preparation programs in the State must meet these standards as part of MSDE's program approval process.

Currently, all teacher education candidates who complete a State approved teacher preparation program leading to certification in early childhood education, elementary education, and special education infant-3 and 1-8 are required to complete twelve credits in reading. Programs leading to secondary teacher certification in Maryland require six credits of reading. All approved teacher preparation programs in the State are required to submit reading course syllabi and their plans for meeting the standards to institutional program review boards and MSDE for approval. Further, all approved programs must demonstrate how they will assess teacher candidate knowledge and performance related to these reading standards.

Maryland's colleges and universities have a long-standing commitment to ensuring that teacher preparation programs at all levels incorporate scientifically-based reading research, defined as "research that applies rigorous, systematic, and objective procedures to obtain valid knowledge relevant to reading development, reading instruction, and difficulties" (*Maryland State Approved Reading Courses Offered by Colleges and Universities*, MSDE, March 2016). Further, they are required to incorporate the "Five Pillars" of research-based reading instruction referenced in SB 638—phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension—and the associated knowledge and skills therein (e.g., assessment, instructional materials including decodable texts for early readers, direct and explicit instruction, differentiated instruction). These reading courses must include multiple course-based assessments and performance measures (including written tests) that evaluate teacher candidates in their understanding and learning of the course concepts and content, and its practical application in teaching students. These assessments provide faculty with formative feedback on teacher candidate performance and learning with respect to reading instruction at multiple points during the preparation process.

SB 638 duplicates and potentially undermines current efforts to update the State's existing reading standards. Over the past two years, reading workgroups and panels have been convened by MSDE to review and update the content, standards, and outcomes for these teacher candidate courses and to further incorporate the latest scientific research on how students learn to read. The higher education community has been actively engaged in this work. Colleges and universities are currently submitting their revised secondary reading courses to MSDE, and a panel is in place to review them. In addition, MSDE has a review team working on the completion of the framework and review rubrics for the four required courses for elementary teachers and is expected to complete that process in Spring 2018. When concluded, this process will result in extensive revisions to every reading course in every teacher preparation program in the State.

Maryland's new reading standards for teacher preparation have been expanded to align with the Maryland College and Career Ready Standards (MCCRS) and to provide a more inclusive concept of literacy—not just reading—including oral language and reading and writing competencies for all students. These new standards also include a renewed and updated emphasis on meeting the needs of students with reading difficulties, providing multi-tiered systems of instructional support, and providing teachers with literacy-based strategies for developing students' cultural competence.

Further, we have specific concerns about the negative ramifications of a statewide assessment for research-based reading instruction that would be required of all Maryland teacher candidates. A one-time end-of-program teacher assessment in reading is unlikely to lead to better classroom instruction or improved student performance. In evaluating the time and expense

associated with an additional assessment for teacher candidates, the State should examine the research to determine whether an assessment of this nature actually makes a difference in teacher effectiveness or student learning outcomes. Any newly proposed assessment should be considered in the broader context of the State's approach to teacher candidate assessment and certification, and not in isolation in a single subject area such as research-based reading instruction, as this legislation proposes.

Of equal concern is the additional financial burden that such an assessment would create for many Maryland teacher candidates. At a time when fewer students are choosing to go into teaching, additional financial barriers could have a detrimental impact on the pipeline. Teacher candidates graduating from Maryland's institutions are already required to submit qualifying scores on specific tests. Another required assessment represents an added expense.

In closing, our institutions are strongly committed to preparing highly effective teachers and incorporating scientifically-based reading research to raise the achievement of all Maryland students. We support the State's long-standing review and accountability processes and the partnership that has been established for reading instruction. These processes directly align college and university faculty with PreK-12 educators and reading specialists to ensure that cutting-edge research informs reading standards, practices, and curricula to benefit all Maryland prepared teachers and students. This legislation, if enacted, would impose costly and redundant requirements on both MSDE and the State's teacher preparation programs, with no evidence that these efforts would lead to improved reading outcomes for teachers or students.

For the reasons stated above, we respectfully oppose Senate Bill 638 and urge an unfavorable committee report.