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BILL: Senate Bill 461
TITLE: Education – Prekindergarten Students - Funding
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COMMITTEE: Budget and Taxation
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Senate Bill 461 establishes specified funding for prekindergarten students by altering the definition of full-time equivalent enrollment to include prekindergarten students in the number of students enrolled for purposes of calculating specified State aid formulas for education.

PSSAM enthusiastically supports Senate Bill 461, which establishes specific funding for prekindergarten students. Maryland's Prekindergarten program is state-funded for four-year-old children who are from families that are economically disadvantaged or homeless. The overall goal of prekindergarten is to provide learning experiences to help children develop and maintain the basic skills necessary to be successful in school. Maryland's prekindergarten program provides appropriate experiences that address the literacy, cognitive, social, emotional, and physical needs of young children, especially our most vulnerable young children who live in poverty.

Prekindergarten is vital because the development that occurs for children between birth and age five is so critical to learning. This five-year period establishes the foundations of thinking, behaving, and emotional security. Prekindergarten programs build early skills in the key learning areas of language, literacy, and mathematics, which provide an academic gain when the child enters kindergarten. In addition, there is evidence that participation in prekindergarten programs significantly reduces the number of children who were identified as having disabilities or placement in special education.

Since the passage of the Bridge to Excellence Act of 2002, local school systems have been providing half-day prekindergarten for all eligible four-year olds - approximately 30,000 students per year. Maryland's nationally recognized school finance system is built on per pupil funding. However, prekindergarten students are **NOT** included in the annual September 30 enrollment counts for State and local education aid. By not counting approximately 30,000 students as enrolled the State funding laws that provide per pupil State and local funding for all students are not triggered. Many school systems also provide a significant amount of full-day prekindergarten to these eligible students.

Under Senate Bill 461, providing full-day prekindergarten would remain entirely at the discretion of the local board - but when it's provided, it would be fully funded. As previously stated, mandated prekindergarten benefits our most vulnerable economically disadvantaged children, and local efforts to serve these students should receive the full benefit of the education funding formulas that apply to all other students.

PSSAM **SUPPORTS** Senate Bill 461 and requests a **favorable** report. It is needed to guarantee that full, accurate, and transparent per pupil funding is provided to support high quality prekindergarten programs.