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BILL: Senate Bill 557
TITLE: Education - Maryland Education Opportunity Account Program - Established
DATE: February 23, 2017
POSITION: OPPOSE
COMMITTEE: Education, Health and Environmental Affairs
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Senate Bill 557 establishes the Maryland Education Opportunity Account Program; stating a specified goal of the State; authorizes a parent of an eligible student to enroll in the Program; declares that a specified student remains an eligible student under specified circumstances; establishes a Maryland Education Opportunity Account Authority; establishes the membership of the Authority; and authorizes specified members to designate a representative with specified rights, powers, and duties.

PSSAM strongly **opposes** Senate Bill 557 because its primary purpose is to create a private school funding program to finance private and parochial school students at the expense of public school students. The use of state funds to finance private school student expenses, including tuition, constitutes the voucher-like tuition program long opposed by PSSAM and public education advocates in Maryland and across the nation.

The Maryland Opportunity Account Program will provide funds to help send children to private and parochial schools. The bottom line is that this legislation would establish a state government administered program to help finance private schools. PSSAM is adamant in our opposition to the precedent that would be the result of this legislation. The financial needs of our public school students must take priority over those who choose a private or parochial education.

PSSAM is responsible for providing a high quality education for close to 900,000 students. Unlike private and parochial schools, Maryland public schools provide effective educational programs for all students, including special education, English language learners, early childhood, and rigorous high school programs that are not always available in parochial and private schools. Additionally, nonpublic schools are not held to the same level of regulation that holds our public schools accountable. Federal regulations place strict mandates on student and school performance as well as educator accountability.

Maryland public schools are also held strictly accountable by local and state measures. Local superintendents fully recognize that strong accountability measures for students and educators translate into strong accountability for public dollars invested in our public schools. The investment in our students has reaped great dividends. Thanks to the financial commitment from our elected officials, the Maryland public school system ranks among the most successful in the nation. We will continue to succeed only if the General Assembly continues to invest taxpayer dollars into funding our validated and recognized statewide success.

For the reasons stated above, PSSAM **OPPOSES** Senate Bill 557 and requests an **unfavorable** committee report.