TO: Senator Joan Carter Conway, Chair, and members of the Education, Health, and Environment Committee  
FROM: Michael Richardson, Upskilling Policy Analyst, National Skills Coalition  
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GED Graduates are Key for Closing Maryland's Middle Skills Gap and for Reaching Educational Attainment Goals

Good afternoon. I’m Michael Richardson, an Upskilling Policy Analyst for the National Skills Coalition located in Washington, DC. National Skills Coalition is a broad-based coalition working to grow the economy by investing in people so that every worker and industry has the skills to compete. We have over 20,000 partners across the country made up of leaders drawn from business, labor, community colleges, community-based organizations and the public workforce system.

I’d like to thank Senator Conway and the members of the Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee for holding this legislative hearing and the Job Opportunities Task Force for their work around these issues and for continuing to be a great partner of the National Skills Coalition for many years. National Skills Coalition supports SB 842 and I’d like to use this time provide National Skills Coalition’s perspective on Maryland’s skill gap and why expanding need-based aid to GED graduates would help fill this gap. I will focus on three points:

- Middle skills are critical to a strong economy in Maryland
- GED graduates can play a role in closing Maryland’s Middle Skill Gap and helping achieve the state’s post-secondary attainment goals
- To achieve these goals, Maryland can pass SB 842 so that more GED graduates have access to affordable post-secondary education.

Middle skills are critical to a strong economy in Maryland

Middle-skill jobs make up the largest part of America’s and Maryland’s labor market, and key industries in Maryland are unable to find enough sufficiently trained workers to fill these jobs. Middle-skill jobs, which require education beyond high school but not a four-year degree, account for 48 percent of Maryland’s labor market, but only 38 percent of the state’s workers are trained to the middle-skill level.¹

¹ National Skills Coalition analysis of Maryland’s middle skill jobs.  
https://www.nationalskillscoalition.org/resources/publications/2017-middle-skills-fact-sheets/file/Maryland-MiddleSkills.PDF
Closing the skill gap can help Maryland’s businesses, workers, and economy. In addition to meeting existing employers’ needs, a skilled workforce can help Maryland attract new companies and keep them in the state. Training Marylanders for middle-skill jobs that pay good wages can also help increase economic security for many families in the state.

GED graduates can play a role in Maryland’s Middle Skill Gap Solution and help achieve the state’s postsecondary attainment goal

Preparing GED graduates for college and careers is important to the state’s overall economic health and to close the skills gap. Maryland has recognized this and has established an ambitious goal for postsecondary attainment. By 2025, Maryland aims to increase the percentage of state residents between 25 and 64 years old with a postsecondary degree to 55 percent. This clear, rigorous postsecondary attainment goal will help focus state policy and spending decisions on middle-skill opportunities and ensure a strong return on investment.

Also, every year 3,500 Marylanders receive their High School Diploma via GED testing. Even if only a portion of these students went on to pursue postsecondary training, it would help close the skill gap and achieve the statewide attainment goal.

To achieve these goals, Maryland can pass SB 842 so that more GED graduates have access to affordable post-secondary education.

Many GED graduates who have low incomes may have a difficult time affording college especially if they are trying to balance family costs or other expenses. Broadening the opportunity for GED graduates to receive need-based aid gives them the opportunity to take advantage of postsecondary credentials that will help fill this gap.

Maryland will have further success in reaching this goal by enacting SB 842, allowing students who earn their high school diploma through examination an opportunity to access one of the state’s largest need-based tuition grants for low-income students. Giving students access to post-secondary educational opportunities opens up possibilities for students to get the middle skills they need to enter into the workforce.

Conclusion

In conclusion, National Skills Coalition applauds Maryland’s dedication and efforts to close the middle-skill gap by increasing the percentage of Marylanders with a postsecondary degree. We hope state leaders work to achieve this ambitious goal by supporting the bill and allowing GED recipients an opportunity to receive need-based funding for post-secondary degrees. We believe it is critical to closing the middle-skill gap and helping Maryland workers and employers have the skills they need to compete and succeed.

Thank you again for your time. I’m happy to answer any questions you have.