



For Immediate Release
March 11, 2020

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LDF Calls for Changes to Maryland's Blueprint Bill to Address Educational Inequities

Like all children in the State of Maryland, Black and Brown children in Baltimore City Schools have the right to an adequate public education under the State constitution. Recently, the Blueprint for Maryland's Future legislation, which adjusts the state's formula for funding schools, was passed by Maryland's House of Delegates. While the bill's funding increase represents a commendable first step toward addressing educational funding problems in Maryland, it is insufficient to address the decades-long deprivation of adequate funding for Baltimore City Schools. In 2017, a review by the State's Department of Legislative Services revealed that Baltimore City Schools were underfunded by an estimated \$342 million per year, leading to, among other things, some of the highest student to teacher ratios in the state. The NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF) calls on the State's Senate to amend the bill so that its funding formula sufficiently addresses pre-existing inequities between counties with high wealth and those with low wealth.

"Right now, the Blueprint bill presumes that students in all school districts in Maryland start from the same place," said [Sherrilyn Ifill](#), LDF's President and Director-Counsel. "The reality is that there is a decades-long, massive adequacy gap that Maryland must fully account for when determining the amount of funding to be provided to each district. Baltimore City is one of only two jurisdictions that does not currently receive sufficient funding to provide children with an adequate education."

Fixing the inadequacies in Maryland's public education system is required by law. More than 20 years ago, the Circuit Court for Baltimore City held in [Bradford v. Maryland State Board of Education](#) that Maryland's Constitution requires the state to ensure that all children receive an adequate education. In a [recent decision](#), Judge Audrey Carrion allowed renewed litigation in [the Bradford case](#) to proceed. Parents in the case are still seeking sufficient funding because state officials ignored court orders for years, leading to the \$342 million annual adequacy gap. Under the current Blueprint bill, the state still would not fill this gap, until, at earliest, FY2024, by which time costs will have increased significantly. This is in addition to the at least the \$3 billion that would be required to bring school facilities up to industry standards. Although separate legislation has been introduced to address school facilities needs statewide, it comes nowhere near providing the amount Baltimore City Schools need.

If the new formula does not begin by completely closing the adequacy gap, students in Baltimore City Schools, the vast majority of whom are Black, will continue to receive a constitutionally inadequate education. Namely, underfunded districts will likely not be able to comply with basic educational standards adopted by the state. For example, Maryland standards for fine arts require schools to provide music, visual arts, theater, dance, and media arts. Currently, less than 25% of K-8 schools in Baltimore have certified art and music teachers and few schools provide theater or dance instruction.

Importantly, the Blueprint bill was amended by the House to protect students by reducing the unrealistic and inequitable demands for contributions from Baltimore City and other jurisdictions with low wealth. That amendment must be kept.

However, there is a vital change to the structure of the funding formula that is still necessary. The bill must provide additional funding immediately for Baltimore City and other jurisdictions with low wealth, in order to ensure that students of color are not left further behind because their school systems are not at the same starting line.

“The time is now: We must ensure that the new formula for funding schools fixes generations of disinvestment by the State of Maryland in the education of Black and Brown children in Baltimore City and other jurisdictions with low wealth,” said [Ajmel Quereshi](#), Senior Counsel at LDF. “Maryland’s Senate must do its due diligence and prioritize this objective as it considers the Blueprint bill in the coming weeks.”

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Founded in 1940, the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF) is the nation’s first civil and human rights law organization. LDF has been completely separate from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) since 1957—although LDF was originally founded by the NAACP and shares its commitment to equal rights. LDF’s Thurgood Marshall Institute is a multi-disciplinary and collaborative hub within LDF that launches targeted campaigns and undertakes innovative research to shape the civil rights narrative. In media attributions, please refer to us as the NAACP Legal Defense Fund or LDF.

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