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BLUEPRINT FOR MARYLAND'S FUTURE

**Accountability & Implementation Board
Fiscal Year 2024 Operating Budget
Response to Department of Legislative Services Analysis
Isiah Leggett, Chair
Rachel Hise, Executive Director**

**Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
Education, Business and Administration Subcommittee
Chair Nancy J. King
February 17, 2023**

**House Appropriations Committee
Education and Economic Development Subcommittee
Chair Stephanie Smith
February 20, 2023**

The Accountability and Implementation Board (AIB) appreciates the opportunity to appear before the budget subcommittee to discuss the Department of Legislative Services' (DLS) analysis of the fiscal 2024 budget and to respond to the requested comments contained within. We thank our analyst, Laura Hyde, for her hard work in providing a thorough analysis and acknowledgement of our efforts throughout. The AIB supports the Governor's FY 2024 allowance, which includes the full required \$4.8 million.

AIB has faced several delays and challenges over the past year since the Board was established. Despite these challenges, AIB has focused on laying a solid foundation for the successful implementation of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future. Foremost, this involved an 8-month process to develop the initial Blueprint Comprehensive Implementation Plan to guide Blueprint implementation over the next 10 years. The process is described in more detail in the initial plan, which was adopted by the AIB on December 1, 2022. The plan and related materials are available on the AIB's website (<https://aib.maryland.gov/Pages/Blueprint-plans.aspx>). Over 1,000 hard copies have been distributed to the Governor, Maryland General Assembly, State and local board of education members and superintendents, county officials, educators, and other interested stakeholders. Hard copies are available to the public at the State House Information Desk and upon request (Google form on AIB website). AIB is in the process of translating the Initial BCP and LEA template into Spanish with additional languages planned. AIB will also translate each LEA Blueprint Implementation Plan into Spanish and other languages as appropriate for the local community. All of these will be posted on the AIB website.

In developing the Initial Blueprint Comprehensive Plan, the AIB solicited and received significant public feedback regarding implementation considerations. These have been included in the initial plan as well as needed technical assistance to support LEAs and State agencies in identifying innovative and creative approaches to implement the Blueprint as intended. In this first year, then, the AIB limited its legislative recommendations to technical corrections that are needed to the law. Recommendations for substantive changes to the law will be considered by AIB if it has been determined that the Blueprint cannot be implemented as required or intended. Legislation has been introduced on behalf of the AIB (SB 913/HB 770) with the technical correction that AIB has recommended regarding the full-day prekindergarten funding formula to provide funding for children with disabilities, children who live in a home where English is not the primary language spoken, and children experiencing homelessness.

The AIB website, launched in Spring 2022, serves as the hub for AIB to share information in a transparent manner with stakeholders and the public on AIB activities and Blueprint implementation. Over the next year, the website will be enhanced to include major Blueprint implementation progress indicators and Blueprint informational materials that are more accessible to the general public. The AIB is deeply committed to engaging stakeholders who represent the rich geographic, racial, ethnic, cultural, economic, and gender diversity of Maryland's residents in implementing the Blueprint for Maryland's Future. To that end, in July 2022, the AIB established four advisory committees to provide additional input and feedback on each of the four content pillars of the Blueprint (Early Childhood, High Quality and Diverse Teachers and Leaders, College and Career Readiness, and More Resources for Students to be Successful). Each committee has six members, including a student. Overall, the members reflect the diversity of the State and include at least 2 members from every region in the State.

Recently, the AIB adopted a Hiring Process and Staffing Plan to guide an aggressive plan to fully staff the agency as soon as possible. In addition to supporting the LEAs and State agencies in developing their Blueprint plans for submission to AIB, the AIB has also appointed an Outcome Measures Workgroup to develop outcome metrics and targets and make recommendations to the AIB for inclusion in the updated Blueprint Comprehensive Plan due August 1.

DLS Requested Comments and Agency Responses: FY2024 Operating Budget

DLS Comment 1 (Page 2): AIB should brief the committees on their current status of operations and availability of allocated funds to support those operations.

AIB Response: Effective July 1, 2022, the Accountability and Implementation Board (AIB) became a separate and independent financial agency and is no longer a sub-division of MSDE. However, this transition was not easy or immediate. With the help of DBM, and other control agencies, the AIB has overcome many start-up challenges faced by new State agencies. As of December 2022, AIB is now a fully functional agency with the ability to process all necessary accounts payable functions and encumber funds, which allows us to show obligated commitments, and avoid budget overspending in upcoming fiscal years. The AIB has made every effort to support Blueprint implementation with the resources available and will continue to do so with the funds that are now accessible for the remainder of fiscal 2023. However, due to the delay in accessing appropriated funds in fiscal 2022 and half of fiscal 2023, AIB has not been able to expend or encumber funds as initially anticipated.

DLS Comment 2 (Page 5): AIB should comment on how the agency expects to use grant funds to cover operating expenses in fiscal 2024.

AIB Response: The AIB has been providing technical assistance in fiscal 2022 and 2023 through current staff as well as a contractual consultant firm. As stated in the analysis, although the appropriation for technical assistance was initially budgeted as grants, that was a temporary placeholder to provide transparency for those funds. The AIB will continue to provide technical assistance primarily through AIB staff and contractual services, which provides AIB with the ability to customize needed TA for individual or multiple LEAs in a timely manner. It also provides more accountability over the quality of TA support and reduces the administrative burden required by each LEA to gain access to these grant funds. One example of this is rather than provide grant funds for each LEA to contract to have its documents translated into other languages, AIB is contracting with one vendor to provide all translation services for AIB, MSDE, and LEA Blueprint implementation plan documents. This is more efficient as it eliminates the need for individual procurements and the vendor will be familiar with the Blueprint plans. Per statute, FY24 is the last year that \$3 million in technical assistance funds is mandated in the budget.

DLS Comment 3 (Page 9): AIB should provide the committees with an update on the status of the agency's annual report and communication plan.

AIB Response: The AIB requested an extension in submitting the annual report until after the Initial Blueprint Comprehensive Plan was completed so that any legislative recommendations could be included in the report. The Presiding Officers provided verbal approval of the extension through staff. The annual report will be completed and submitted next week.

The AIB is charged with developing and implementing a public education and outreach campaign for the Blueprint for Maryland's Future to increase public awareness of the Blueprint and progress in achieving the goals. This is included in the Initial Blueprint Comprehensive Implementation Plan under Pillar 5 Objective 4 Task 7. The AIB will be hiring an outside consultant to develop a formal outreach/communication strategy and plan and will be recruiting for an Outreach and Communications Director as part of its Staffing Plan.

AIB has identified open, clear and transparent communication with LEAs and other Blueprint partners as a key component of its work. This includes regular staff meetings with LEAs and other Blueprint partners to support Blueprint implementation. Staff meets with the Blueprint Coordinators at least monthly, and often every 2 weeks, to respond to questions and discuss implementation considerations. Regular meetings are also held with LEA CFOs. AIB and MSDE staff have held 34 joint technical assistance sessions with LEAs to date beginning in December 2022 to support development of their Blueprint Implementation Plans. This does not include one-on-one meetings with each LEA to provide feedback on their draft plans that began earlier this month or weekly office hours that are available for LEAs to meet individually with staff. AIB and MSDE staff are discussing plans for technical assistance sessions following the March 2023 plan submissions to support ongoing Blueprint implementation and development of March 2024 plan submissions. AIB will continue to support LEAs through ongoing staff support and outside contractors as appropriate.

DLS Comment 4 (Page 10): AIB should comment as to whether review of LEA and State and implementation plans is impacted by vacant positions (Page 10).

AIB Response: While it will be challenging, AIB does not anticipate that the review of implementation plans will be impacted by vacant positions. AIB will utilize external reviewers where appropriate to augment AIB member and staff review of plans in this first year. All State and local plans will be reviewed, and feedback will be provided within 3 months of initial submission. It is likely that these initial plans will require some revisions. Once revised plans are submitted, and potentially additional feedback and revisions are made, AIB will approve or disapprove final revised plans within one month of resubmission for State plans or MSDE recommendation for LEA plans.

DLS Recommendation: *Submit a status update on closeout expenditures for fiscal 2023 and expenditures to date for fiscal 2024, staff hired in fiscal 2022, 2023, and 2024 including position, salary, responsibilities, and vacancies, and completed MFR objectives for Goal 1 and how the agency might improve estimated response times for State and local education agency Comprehensive Implementation Plan reviews.*

AIB Response: The AIB concurs with the recommendation made by the analyst.