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Testimony before the Ways and Means Committee

In SUPPORT of House Bill 966- Public Schools- Fees for Summer School Courses- Prohibition

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February 28, 2019**

Article VIII, Section 1 of the Maryland State Constitution established a thorough and efficient system of free public schools. The Constitution makes no distinction as to the cost of a public education at varying times of the calendar year, so **we must assume that access to public school education shall remain free at all times of the year, including the summer months.**

In 2018, the ACLU joined four Prince George's County students in their legal challenge against their own school district over exorbitant fees of **\$455 per class for summer school courses**. Prince George's County Public Schools maintained that almost all districts across the state charge their own students for summer school courses. Montgomery County Public Schools charged up to \$300 per summer school course for county residents and \$340 for nonresidents.¹ This status quo is unacceptable. The ability to pay for summer school courses is sometimes the difference between on-time graduation and an entire school year's delay. **For low-income students looking for missed or supplemental course credits, the status quo is a clear and present punishment for living in poverty.**

It is unconscionable that school districts anywhere are content to use their own students as fundraising opportunities, let alone in Maryland, where the Kirwan Commission has been working on recommendations to reduce barriers to academic achievement for low income students, amongst other areas. Maryland has a reputation for being one of the richest states in the Union, but that reputation does not hold for all marginalized populations in the state. **Local policies requiring payment for summer school courses have classist implications, an alarming consequence in this era of increased statewide income stratification.**²

House Bill 950 will prohibit Maryland's local school systems from charging their own students enrollment fees for summer school courses, a necessary measure in this age of increasing economic inequality. **ACY strongly supports this bill and urges a favorable report.**

¹Truong, Debbie. "ACLU joins students' challenge to Prince George's summer school tuition prices" The Washington Post, October 21, 2018.

² Maryland Department of Planning. "Income Inequality Continues to Grow in Maryland" Maryland State Data Center.