

EDUCATION ADVOCATE

Get Engaged

A Letter from Dana Vickers Shelley

Executive Director, ACLU of Maryland

Dear Colleagues,

As Executive Director of the ACLU of Maryland, I write to let you know that our long-time Education Director, Bebe Verdery, has shared with me her intention to retire at the end of May.

As you know, Bebe has been a driving force in state and city education policies and funding for the last 21 years. Some of the most notable achievements Bebe and ACLU-MD education staff members over the years have accomplished are:

- Passage of the Bridge to Excellence Act (“Thornton” formula) in 2002, bringing \$1.6 billion to Maryland schools, \$270 m. a year to Baltimore City schools;
- Organizing in counties and in state coalition to defeat the rollback of Thornton with a 10,000-person rally in Annapolis in 2004;
- Collaborating to re-write the Baltimore City schools’ Code of Conduct to reduce reliance on suspensions and pushing the State Board of Education to adopt guidelines to reduce racially disproportionate suspensions;
- Successfully advocating to provide and fund full-day pre-kindergarten for children from low-income families;
- Publishing studies that proposed new financing options to modernize Baltimore City’s crumbling school buildings and then working in coalition to pass \$1.1 billion in funding for the Baltimore City 21st Century School Building Program;
- Pushing the upcoming rewrite of the education funding formula toward the needs of children in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty.



Bebe writes:

“I have been so fortunate to work alongside so many hard-working, committed education advocates, parents, students, school staff, and elected officials over the years in so many important campaigns at the state and local level. Our work has made a demonstrable difference in the lives of young people, whether

providing additional funding to provide essential staff and programs or new or improved buildings with natural light, play space, and modern technology. Seeing the excitement on children’s faces as they came into new school buildings this year was one of the highlights of my work life. I look forward to following all of your and the ACLU’s successes in the upcoming Kirwan campaign, in finishing the school construction program, and in improving school climate. It has been a privilege. Thank you all for your support.”

Photo Caption: Strong support in Annapolis during the 2019 General Assembly for funding modern, safe, and healthy school buildings in Maryland. (Left to right: Speaker Pro Tem Adrienne Jones, Rick Tyler, Bebe Verdery, Frank Patinella, and Dr. Alvin Thornton).

The ACLU of Maryland is focused on enforcing the state constitution’s guarantee of a “thorough and efficient” education for Maryland’s schoolchildren and along that line, you will be hearing more from us in coming weeks about our *Bradford* legal case. Our capable education team — Frank Patinella, Kim Humphrey, Justin Nalley, and Nicole McCann — will continue working with coalition partners to make progress on these important education issues as the next phase of our education work takes shape.

Please join me in thanking Bebe for her years of dedicated work and wishing her well as she enjoys some well-earned time with her family.

Best,
Dana



American Civil Liberties Union of Maryland / Education

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