

## Educating Adults

A proposed reorganization of Maryland state services is aimed at connecting teaching and testing to jobs.

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MENTION EDUCATION and what comes to mind is a child, not an adult unable to read, write or get a good job. In a system fixated on K through 12, adult education often gets short shrift. That's why there is merit in a proposal by Maryland Gov. Martin O'Malley (D) to create a comprehensive workforce development system that would devote more attention to the critical needs of adults.

Mr. O'Malley's plan, now before the General Assembly, would transfer adult education and literacy, correctional education and general equivalency diploma testing services from the Education Department to the Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation. The idea is to align all the programs with workforce creation efforts so that resources are used more effectively and outcomes are improved. That could mean, for instance, that an inmate who earned a GED would also be trained in a skill, coached in how to get a job and even put in touch with potential employers. It's estimated that about 750,000 Marylanders lack good literacy skills, proficiency in English or a high school diploma. The state enrolls about 35,000 people a year in literacy programs, while 5,000 languish on waiting lists. Labor Secretary Thomas E. Perez says that a streamlined system would mean "more services and more opportunities to more people."

The measure, expected to come up for a vote this week in the Senate Finance Committee, is opposed by the state Education Department and a coalition of nonprofit groups that currently provide some of the state's literacy programs. They say the educational component of the programs will suffer -- but the opposition may have more to do with an aversion to change and worries about the loss of funding and turf. Mr. O'Malley's proposal is generally backed by the presidents of community colleges in the state. Many of them took over adult education programs at the behest of local school officials who realized they weren't doing a good job because most of their energy was focused -- as it should be -- on children. The community colleges, which provide cost-effective adult education, don't foresee any loss in educational quality if the shift is made -- and they are probably right.