

FROM CRADLE TO CAREER:

Investing in Our Students and Building a World-Class
Public Education System



We must build an education system where all students have the opportunity to succeed, regardless of who they are or where they are from.

As a state, we have made significant and meaningful strides to be a national leader in improving our education system. We are fortunate to have strong schools and educators, stakeholders, and parents dedicated to ensuring every student has the opportunity to succeed. We are also fortunate for the tremendous work of the Kirwan Commission and the Blueprint for Maryland's Future, which Wes advocated for and testified in support of side-by-side with educators, parents, and students. This historic legislation has already set Maryland on a path to future success and will enable us to break down long-standing inequities and transform our ability to deliver every child a world-class education regardless of their ZIP code. Now is the time to continue the progress we have made to fully fund and implement the Blueprint because from cradle to career, education is one of the key pillars for Marylanders to access jobs, higher wages, and the opportunity to build wealth that can be passed on to their children.

This is especially critical as we recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, which has left many students further behind and impacted their social and emotional well-being. It has also impacted educators, education support professionals (ESPs), and other school staff, further driving these workers out of the profession at alarming rates and worsening existing shortages. When we are unable to appropriately staff our schools, it impacts our students' ability to learn and deepens inequities. Educational disparities exist for many students, including low-income and students with disabilities, but we know that students of color often experience the greatest disparities. We must overcome these challenges and build an education system where all students have the opportunity to succeed, regardless of who they are or where they are from.

Wes comes from a long line of educators and strongly believes in the power of education. Wes has dedicated his career to improving access to education. After returning from the U.S. Army, Wes founded a Baltimore-based small business geared at improving college completion rates for historically underserved Marylanders, and during his tenure, retention rates increased by nearly 20%. Wes then went on to be the CEO of one of the nation's largest organizations fighting poverty, where he was able to leverage private funding sources to improve lives. As CEO, Wes helped secure and invest over \$100 million in education funding and supports for children and educators. He also formed a partnership with other organizations to close the racial wealth gap in America, which led to investments in 74 new community schools.

As governor, Wes will always guarantee education is a top priority. He will ensure the Blueprint is fully funded and implemented, and he will work closely with local leaders, educators, parents, and community organizations to address our most pressing challenges.



Child Care Center fees in the state often exceed in-state college tuition.¹

CONTINUE THE TRANSFORMATION OF MARYLAND'S EDUCATION SYSTEM

Fully fund and implement the Blueprint for Maryland's Future. The Kirwan Commission and the resulting legislation creating the Blueprint for Maryland's Future have been transformative for our state's public education system and are serving as a model for other states around the nation. Wes has been a tremendous advocate of the Commission and Blueprint, having testified in support of both during their creation. The Blueprint lays out clear funding goals for the future and will address long-standing inequities in our system to ensure educators have the tools they need and families receive the education they deserve. With the framework clearly laid out, it is now the responsibility of Maryland's next governor to work together with local school districts to ensure the Blueprint receives full funding and is implemented appropriately statewide. As governor, Wes will be fully committed to doing just that. Wes will ensure the Blueprint's Accountability and Implementation Board receives dedicated funding to assess progress and provide technical support to localities, something Maryland's current governor has refused to do. He will also ensure Maryland's State Department of Education (MSDE) is resourced and equipped to support the Board's work, along with the work of localities, while also ensuring educators and parents have a voice throughout implementation. Wes will not allow our progress to slow or stop.

BUILD A HOLISTIC EARLY CHILDHOOD INFRASTRUCTURE

Reduce the cost burden of infant and toddler care. The first five years of a child's life are some of the most challenging for Maryland families. The infrastructure in place too often fails to support children and their parents in this pivotal stage of life when children need a nurturing environment. For many, cost prohibits them from quality child care for infants and toddlers. Since the start of the pandemic, Maryland has lost over 850 child-care centers and child care center fees in the state often exceed in-state college tuition.² This cost burden often forces parents, especially mothers, out of their careers when they need to earn income the most. Wes has worked with parents and other stakeholders in the state to develop a plan of action based on the belief that every infant and toddler deserves high-quality care and every parent in Maryland deserves affordable options for that care. As governor, Wes will take action to lower costs at child care facilities for families in need as well as help foster new, affordable early childhood



The vast majority of early childhood workers are women, and nearly half are women of color.

infrastructure to serve all Marylanders. The Moore-Miller administration will work with the General Assembly to fully fund the Child Care Scholarship fund and streamline the application and approval process so more families are able to access the funding. That includes allowing for presumptive eligibility so families and providers can access funding while an application is being processed and ensuring families who are seeking work can obtain child care while they look for a job. Wes will also work to ensure child care and early learning programs are focused on identifying and supporting young children with disabilities so we can more quickly connect their families with resources.

Deliver preschool for all children in need.³ It should come as no surprise that in addition to improving outcomes for children and families, these early investments also produce tremendous economic returns. Every \$1 invested in quality programs can result in up to \$13 in benefits to our economy.⁴ Maryland has taken important steps to lower the cost of preschool for Maryland families as part of the Blueprint for Maryland's future, but our children cannot wait 10-plus years for the plan's full implementation. Additionally, many families above 300% of the federal poverty level still struggle to afford the cost of high-quality early childhood education. As governor, Wes will accelerate Maryland's path to preschool for all three- and four-year old children, as well as the creation of all new required Judy and Family Support Centers. Wes will also explore opportunities to expand the criteria for free preschool so that additional families and children can benefit. These investments will better ensure our youngest Marylanders are positioned to succeed in life and in the workplace.

Strengthen Maryland's early childhood education and child care programs.

The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the vital role of Maryland's child care infrastructure such as our early childhood education centers and child care providers for families across our state and our economy. Without a strong child care network, families and businesses have suffered as caregivers, particularly women, have been forced to leave the labor force to care for their families.⁵ As governor, Wes will focus heavily on strengthening Maryland's early childhood education and child care systems and building capacity among private care providers as part of that solution. Wes will leverage the framework adopted in the 2021 legislation creating the Growing Family Child Care Opportunities Pilot Program and exploring opportunities to grow the program in future years. He will also work with stakeholders to develop a system for privately operated early childhood education centers and child care providers to assess safety, quality of curriculum, affordability, and accessibility, and provide additional subsidies to those who serve families in need. Finally, Wes will improve oversight and coordination with MSDE, including technical assistance for providers.

Support Maryland's early childhood workforce. We know that the first five years of a child's life are foundational to their learning. However, we are underpaying our early childhood workforce despite the invaluable work that they do to support the development of children across Maryland. In fact, early educators are paid significantly less than and experience a higher rate of poverty than K-8 educators.⁶ There are also tremendous gender and racial inequities within this sector of the workforce. The vast



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majority of early childhood workers are women, and nearly half are women of color.⁷ So while the early childhood workforce is one of the most racially diverse in the education sector, it is also one of the most underpaid in the nation, which is unacceptable. As governor, Wes will work to support Maryland's early childhood workforce by fully funding and implementing the Blueprint, which includes funding to assist with the cost of obtaining the necessary education and credentials to become an early childhood educator. Wes will also work across both public and private sectors to advocate for greater salaries for this essential workforce and incorporate this field into Maryland's CTE programs to grow the pipeline of workers.

SETTING CHILDREN AND STUDENTS UP FOR SUCCESS

Invest in 21st Century Schools. Like many states around the nation, Maryland is facing significant challenges with aging and crumbling school infrastructure. A national report found that more than 50% of school districts across the nation had school buildings in need of multiple system upgrades or repairs.⁸ A 2021 report by the Interagency Commission on School Construction in Maryland indicates the average age of school buildings is 30 years.⁹ In a sampling of 268 schools during the study period, nearly 30% of schools were rated as in "not adequate" or "poor" condition, and the cost of necessary repairs or replacements statewide is \$60 billion.¹⁰ We cannot expect students to learn, grow and thrive, or be prepared to step into 21st-century jobs if their school buildings are outdated and crumbling around them. Our state can and should be doing more to invest in 21st Century Schools. As governor, Wes will work to create new funding and financing sources for school construction to support local school districts in their efforts to improve infrastructure.

Reinstate Maryland's Governor's Office for Children. As Maryland works to address disparities for children, improve access to education, health and well-being, it is essential that the Governor's Office for Children be fully reinstated as an independent office. In 2020, Governor Hogan eliminated the office and transferred its duties to the newly renamed Office of Crime Prevention, Youth, and Victims Services, limiting its scope and focusing more narrowly on criminal-justice-related issues. We know that keeping children safe and setting them up for a lifetime of success requires a holistic approach and collaboration across numerous federal, state, and local government agencies, as well as with community partners. As governor, Wes will broaden the scope of this office to focus on social/emotional well-being, addressing food insecurity, combating youth homelessness, and expanding access to essential behavioral health services. He will also bring a renewed focus to its importance in the governor's office and ensure strong cross-departmental collaboration by ensuring all relevant state agencies have a seat at the table along with key community partners. Wes will focus on building a robust system to collect and share data, as well as track longitudinal data to understand how Maryland's children are faring and opportunities to improve services.

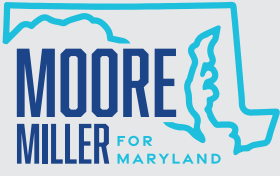


Research consistently demonstrates that providing out-of-school educational time and programs can dramatically improve outcomes for students.

Provide better services for students with disabilities. Students with disabilities face some of the greatest disparities in education, we know learning disruptions during the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in disproportionate impacts for these students. As governor, Wes will remain committed to fully funding the targeted dollars for students receiving special education services included in Maryland's Blueprint, and will work to secure the additional funding needed to ensure students with disabilities are well-positioned for a bright future in the workforce. That includes urging our partners in Congress to fully fund the Individuals Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) that has been consistently underfunded to the tune of \$350.7 million per year. Importantly, we must also address the critical shortage of special education teachers that existed long before the pandemic. Wes recognizes the people closest to the challenges are also closest to the solutions and as governor, he will work closely with educators and parents to ensure we are offering them the competitive wages and benefits needed to address staffing shortages and the tools they need to provide for students.

Support intervention and enrichment opportunities to help Maryland students succeed. Preliminary early fall assessment and kindergarten readiness scores released by the MSDE highlight the challenge that lies ahead in addressing the impacts of learning disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the preliminary data, 35% of students met or exceeded expectations in English Language Arts (ELA) and 15% in Math. This represents a decrease compared to 2018-2019 assessment data where 43.7% of students met or exceeded expectations in ELA and 33.0% in Math for grades 3-8.¹¹ These data further highlighted the decreases in kindergarten readiness.¹² As governor, Wes will continue to support local school districts and ensure that each has the resources they need to address their specific needs and invest in strategic approaches for addressing learning disruptions such as afterschool and summer programs, social and emotional support, and early literacy. Wes will also ensure Maryland's Blueprint, which includes resources for tutoring and summer learning programs, is fully funded and implemented so our students are positioned for success.

Expand community schools. Maryland currently has 260 operational community schools.¹³ We know that when children come to school hungry, after experiencing trauma, or when they're dealing with a treatable health condition, their ability to participate and learn in school is negatively impacted. Community schools allow local school districts to engage with educators, parents, and students, and partner with community organizations to conduct a needs assessment and then provide access to necessary resources and services at the school, whether that be nutrition programs, trauma-informed care, dental services, workforce training, or something else. This provides a central location for students and their families where children are already spending a majority of their days. These models have demonstrated success in Maryland and around the nation, which is why the Blueprint seeks to convert 30% of Maryland's schools to community schools over the next decade. However, these efforts are only as successful as the support from the state and community partnerships that support



Wes will work to ensure Maryland schools adopt inclusive, LGBTQ+-affirming policies.

them. Wes strongly believes that the reinstated Office of Children can be a key partner with the MSDE in supporting community schools and building local relationships. He will also ensure the Blueprint is fully funded and implemented so more communities can benefit from these models.

Prioritize social/emotional learning. Many students in Maryland come to school having faced one or more traumatic events in their lives, which impacts their ability to learn and thrive in the classroom.¹⁴ Now, the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in additional stressors and challenges for students, and as we continue to understand the extent to which it has negatively impacted their social and emotional learning, we must double down on implementing innovative approaches to address trauma and ensure our students are receiving the appropriate support.¹⁵ Maryland law requires teacher preparation to include social/emotional learning and how to meet the needs of students,¹⁶ and the Blueprint specifically directed local jurisdictions to deploy federal funding to address the impacts of the pandemic on students' well-being.¹⁷ As governor, Wes will work with stakeholders to build on this foundation to incorporate restorative practices into our approach to education so that we can address the specific needs of each student. He knows there is more to do to address caseloads of the professional and support staff providing these services. He is committed to providing leadership and support to train, hire, and retain more school counselors, social workers, school psychologists and ESPs to better align with industry standards for student to adult ratios and other professional compensation and benefits.

Support students who identify as LGBTQ+. Students who identify as LGBTQ+ in Maryland face significant disparities compared to their peers, and often report not feeling safe in schools. More than half of LGBTQ+ youth in Maryland report they have been harassed or assaulted in schools.¹⁸ Nationwide, LGBTQ+ youth are also more likely to experience depression and are more likely to attempt suicide. In fact, nearly half of LGBTQ+ youth and more than 50% of transgender youth seriously considered suicide in 2021. In fact, nearly half of LGBTQ+ youth seriously considered suicide in 2021, and for transgender youth that number was even higher.¹⁹ Additionally, members of this community are more likely to experience housing instability and food insecurity, and are more likely to be represented in the foster care system.²⁰ These numbers are staggering and it is clear that our state can do more to support individuals identifying as LGBTQ+, especially in our schools. Schools should be safe learning environments where students can live and learn free from fear, bullying, and harassment. As governor, Wes will work to ensure Maryland schools adopt inclusive, LGBTQ+-affirming policies including strong provisions to combat bullying and harassment. He will also create partnerships with organizations working with LGBTQ+ youth to provide the additional tools and resources needed to support our students. Wes will also expand access to trauma-informed mental health care in schools where students can feel safe getting the care they need.

Combat the school-to-prison pipeline. Schools should be a place where students feel safe and supported while they learn, grow, and thrive. Unfortunately, far too many

students come to school and face disproportionate disciplinary actions and may even be referred to the juvenile justice system for behaviors that could be resolved within the school system. A recent study indicated that students in Maryland were arrested at a rate of 3.1 students per 1,000, compared to the national arrest rate of 1.2 students per 1,000.²¹ Additionally, Black students in Maryland faced disproportionate levels of arrest. In fact, 66% of all arrests in the studied school year were of Black students despite the fact that these students only made up 34% of the student population, demonstrating clear inequities. It is essential that Maryland take steps to combat the school-to-prison pipeline and implement and provide resources towards restorative practices in schools. As governor, Wes will revive Maryland's Commission on the School-to-Prison Pipeline and Restorative Practices and work to implement the Commission's recommendations. Wes will also work with the legislature to eliminate criminal penalties for "disorderly conduct" in schools, which is an overly broad charge and has the effect of criminalizing adolescent behavior. Finally, Wes will partner with local school districts, law enforcement and educators to create a new model Memorandum of Understanding for School Resource Officers (SROs) to ensure SROs are not involved in school disciplinary decisions. A collective focus to proactively address student trauma and mental health needs, instituting restorative practices, and helping students build relationships will reduce the need for disciplinary consequences.

Continue to invest in afterschool and summer programs. Maryland has made tremendous progress investing in education and wraparound support for students through the adoption and ongoing implementation of the Blueprint. That includes increasing funding for afterschool and summer learning programs. Unfortunately, the unmet need and barriers to participation remain high. Many parents find existing programs to be unaffordable, and nearly 400,000 Maryland children who could benefit from an afterschool program lack access to one, and 250,000 children lack access to summer programs.²² Research consistently demonstrates that providing out-of-school educational time and programs can dramatically improve outcomes for students, including increasing high school graduation rates, combating disrupted learning, improving social-emotional well-being, and reducing crime.²³ Because of unmet needs and lack of available programs, nearly 150,000 Maryland children remain unsupervised between 3:00-6:00 pm.²⁴ This is unfair and puts children and families at risk. As governor, Wes will build strong community partnerships, as well as public-private partnerships, to expand access to these critical programs. This will help to address disrupted learning, keep our students safe, and provide parents with much-needed support.

Close the digital divide. Maryland ranks third in the nation in terms of IT infrastructure, yet around 108,000 households with school-aged children do not even have access to the internet.²⁵ Additionally, 18% of Maryland households do not have a computer in their homes, and this digital divide is most serious among low-income



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communities and communities of color.²⁶ We know that access to broadband and computing devices directly correlates to access to opportunity, whether educational, economic, or health-related. In fact, access to broadband has been established as a social determinant of health, meaning that individuals with access to broadband are more likely to be healthier and experience greater economic stability.²⁷ As governor, Wes is committed to delivering universal broadband access in Maryland and will work to ensure every student has access to computing devices in their homes needed to enhance their education. Thankfully, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Package is set to give Maryland \$100 million to enhance broadband coverage across the state and help low-income families afford services.

ATTRACT AND RETAIN THE EDUCATION WORKFORCE OF THE FUTURE

Strengthen collective bargaining rights. The right of workers to organize and speak with a collective voice is fundamental. As governor, Wes will work to strengthen collective bargaining rights for our educators and ESPs and ensure a strong voice for those who work tirelessly to prepare our students to be Maryland's future in the face of unprecedented challenges. This will enable these professionals to fight for better wages and stronger benefits. Smaller class sizes are especially important in classes with children with disabilities, as well as with pre-k and kindergarten-aged children who need more direct attention to assist their learning at such a young age. As governor, Wes will support efforts to ensure teachers have the ability to include class sizes in their collective bargaining agreements. Particularly in light of the disrupted learning caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, it's more important now than ever that we enable teachers to best address the needs of their students.

Raise teachers' and education support professionals' salaries throughout the state. Our nation is facing a national teacher shortage, especially in critical subject areas. Like other states, Maryland is losing teachers and some jurisdictions are facing hundreds of shortages.²⁸ Making matters worse, Maryland is also facing shortages in ESPs and substitute teachers, which exacerbates this crisis. Maryland does not produce enough graduates from teacher preparation programs to keep up with demand, and we end up recruiting about half of our new teachers from outside of the state.²⁹ When we are unable to properly staff our classrooms with highly-qualified educators and ESPs, our students pay the price. One way to improve recruitment and retention is to make the profession more attractive by making sure educators have a voice at decision-making tables across the state and by providing better pay. As governor, Wes will make it clear that Maryland values teachers and ESPs, and he will ensure educators have their voices heard and will assist in making teaching a more financially appealing career choice to



attract the very best talent to teach in our schools. That includes supporting pay raises included in the Blueprint and those still necessary to meet all of our staffing challenges. Wes also supported legislation during the 2022 legislative session to provide bonuses to ESPs and conduct an ongoing study of compensation needs moving forward.

Expand innovative teacher mentorship and career ladder programs. Across the country—including right here in Maryland—school districts are utilizing innovative models for educator professional development. At a time when nearly half of Maryland’s educators are leaving the profession within their first three years, it is essential to prioritize strong mentorship and professional development opportunities to keep educators in the classroom.³⁰ Some models leverage highly-talented educators to take on additional responsibilities, including training and supporting younger and newer professionals in teams, allowing them to earn additional compensation or other benefits. These models have been employed to both improve student outcomes as well as teacher retention.³¹ As governor, Wes will work with local school districts to expand these models across the state with the goal to provide the supports and opportunities educators need to be successful.

Recruit, prepare, and retain high-quality, diverse educators. In order to address teacher shortages and improve diversity within the profession, we must utilize innovative approaches to attract students to enter the profession. There are numerous initiatives and approaches that can be leveraged to help Maryland improve these efforts. “Grow Your Own” teacher preparation programs build interest in the teaching profession and prepare people to enter the field. As part of these programs, we must focus on recruiting diverse students, because research is clear that having educators of color in the classroom improves student outcomes and breaks down inequities, especially for students of color.³² Additionally, the Teaching Fellows for Maryland Scholarship provides full-tuition scholarships to Maryland students who pledge to work as public school teachers in Maryland, and the Teacher Academy run through MSDE creates pathways to the educator workforce while also providing course credit.³³ As governor, Wes’s administration will expand both of these programs and others like them to create a steady pipeline of talented educators in our state. He will also explore opportunities to provide funding for a marketing campaign centered around recruiting diverse educators, exam stipends, specialized mentorship programs, job placement services, and more. Additionally, he will work to expand the Student Loan Debt Relief Tax Credit Program and partner with organizations and Maryland HBCUs that specialize in recruiting, preparing, and supporting diverse teacher candidates to create pipelines into our schools and classrooms. Finally, Wes will also be a champion for education professionals and celebrate their work so they feel supported, appreciated and respected. Finally, Wes will also be a champion for addressing the shortages in the ranks of ESPs. He will celebrate their work so they know they are supported, appreciated and respected for the critical roles they play in school buildings and for students and families.

PUT MARYLAND BACK ON TRACK FOR MODERN WORKFORCE READINESS

Implement a Service Year Option program. Wes recognizes that approaching high school graduation without a definitive plan on next steps can be daunting for some students, especially those who are not ready to enroll in higher education, may not have the skills they need to step into the workforce or are unsure of what career is right for them. These students need additional support and experience that will set them on a path to success. That is why Wes will implement a Service Year Option program that will be integrated into the implementation of the Blueprint, enabling Maryland high school graduates to serve for a year in a public service role in exchange for job training, mentorship, and other support, including compensatory tuition at a Maryland college or university. This program will build a stronger sense of community and service across the state and create new opportunities for students to access good jobs.

Strengthen and expand Career and Technical Education (CTE) offerings. Maryland's CTE programs provide unique opportunities for students to prepare students for college and specific career clusters. However, the current administration's proposed budget includes \$1 million in cuts to the CTE Committee and Skills Board, the entity in charge of creating a successful framework for these programs.³⁴ Additionally, a 2019 report on CTE programs in Baltimore found that two-thirds of students who participated in the program were making less than \$12,140 per year six years after graduation.³⁵ We know that CTE opportunities are essential pathways that can allow students to gain in-demand skills that are needed for countless jobs in our economy. That's why, as governor, Wes will ensure CTE programs are aligned with Maryland's needs and produce successful outcomes for participants. This means making sure the ramp up of CTE opportunities, including those in the Blueprint, must be fully funded and supported and that partnerships with local governments, community colleges and specific employers are better link students to in-demand careers. As a part of this expansion, it is time for Maryland to incorporate a focus on early childhood education among its CTE career clusters to build an early childhood pipeline and ensure students are exposed to opportunities in this field early.

Create new opportunities for students to participate in dual enrollment programs and apprenticeships. In addition to increasing investments in credentialing programs, tackling the skills gap in Maryland will require an increased focus on apprenticeships, which provide students on-the-job training in addition to their coursework. Apprenticeships also allow students to gain early entry into a labor market and develop relationships with businesses seeking skilled workers.³⁶ Maryland has a robust apprenticeship program, but we must grow and expand the program to ensure that we are creating opportunities and driving workforce growth in essential areas. As governor,



Wes will increase funding for apprenticeships and work with labor organizations and the business community to drive students into high-demand and high-paying jobs in high-demand fields like quantum computing, IT, cybersecurity, health care and advanced manufacturing. Wes will also support and build on the goals of the Blueprint related to expanded access to dual enrollment programs while students are in high school so they can obtain college credits prior to graduation.

Produce 150,000 Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) graduates by 2027. STEM industries and jobs have grown significantly over the past decade and that growth is only expected to continue.³⁷ In addition to driving innovation across sectors, STEM jobs can also offer more than twice the median wages of non-STEM jobs.³⁸ In order to meet the demands of Maryland's existing industries and attract new ones that will grow our economy and create new opportunities for Marylanders, we must accelerate our ability to produce STEM graduates. We must also improve diversity so that historically underrepresented women and students of color are able to access the same opportunities.³⁹ As governor, Wes will expand Maryland's successful P-Tech program to additional public schools, which leverages partnerships between school districts, the business community, and our institutions of higher education so that students can obtain a cost-free associate's degree in key STEM fields. Wes will also set clear benchmarks for institutions of higher education and community colleges to produce 40,000 new STEM graduates each year and utilize incentives like tuition assistance and loan forgiveness to drive students into STEM programs and reward institutions for achieving their benchmarks. Additionally, Wes will develop public-private partnerships with industry leaders to fund STEM apprenticeships to ensure students can earn while they learn.

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