KATIE FRY HESTER
Legislative District 9
Carroll and Howard Counties

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Education, Health, and
Environmental Affairs Committee

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Chair, Joint Committee on
Cybersecurity, Information Technology
and Biotechnology

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March 3rd, 2020

Testimony in Support of SB894 - County Boards of Education - Computer Science Courses

Chair Pinsky, Vice Chair Kagan, members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs committee:

Thank you for your consideration of SB894. This simple bill would require county boards of education to submit to MSDE a report on the availability of computer science courses and their utilization throughout the state. This data is then required to be posted "conspicuously" on the county board's website. The specific data to be reported includes:

- The total number, substance, and advanced placement status of computer science courses offered in each public school in the county;
- The number and percentage of students enrolled in each computer science course, disaggregated by key metrics including grade, gendere, race/ethnicity, and special education status, etc.;
- The number, gender, and educational attainment of computer science instructors at each school in the county

This bill also provides for student confidentiality by allowing the county board to replace specific numerical values with a symbol of their choice if the value is small enough to determine the identity of a student or group of students.

In the modern economy, computer science skills are quickly becoming indispensable. From obviously connected fields like IT and cybersecurity, to more seemingly tangential fields like agriculture and manufacturing, a baseline knowledge of computer science and coding skills have become incredible competitive advantages, if not outright prerequisites for employment. As such, our educational system should be making attempts to expand access to the acquisitions of these skills throughout the K-12 system. The first step to doing so, however, is to take stock of

our current utilization and continuously collect data to track the utilization of computer science courses throughout the State. This bill will also collect data that can be used to better understand gender, race, socioeconomic, and other disparities within the tech industry - with a particular focus on how those disparities may present themselves in our K-12 system. Currently, women (particularly women of color) are notoriously underrepresented in tech fields.

According to a study conducted by a coalition of private sector actors including Microsoft and Intel, 47% of girls in Middle and High school express an interest in computer science fields, but only 23% go on to take a computer science course. An early lack of representation in K-12 computer science classrooms is then reflected in computing fields, where women only make up 26% of the workforce. This disparity is especially pronounced for black, Latina, and Native American women, who make up only 4% of the computing workforce.

Every child deserves the opportunity to pursue a career in technology, and given the shortages the state currently faces in terms of computing based professions, increasing access to computer science educational opportunities fulfills an area of need within our economy. However, the first step to doing so is to understand what is currently available and being utilized within the State of Maryland. This simple bill allows us to take that first step, and for that reason **I respectfully request a favorable report for SB894.**

Sincerely,

Senator Katie Fry Hester
Howard and Carroll Counties