

To Whom It May Concern:

I don't trust Baltimore County Public Schools. As a BCPS student for the past twelve years, I have seen the school system mess up one thing after another – buying millions of dollars' worth of laptops from a company the Superintendent secretly consulted for; allowing my high school to approach 500 students over its state-rated capacity; leaving such obtuse vulnerabilities in their data systems that they were devastated by a cyberattack this fall. Each mishap was initiated by their own incompetence. My father is a first-grade teacher at a County school. When BCPS claims they will keep him safe, I don't trust any of it.

First grade is not something you can teach online. While many of us struggle with the technical difficulties of online meetings, imagine what it's like to teach six-year-olds to fix their own technical issues without being able to see their screens. Online school is functional, but it's just not cutting it. Going back to school in person gives elementary-age students the opportunity to actually do first grade – through number cubes, play-doh, and other hands-on aspects critical to development at that age, they can now begin to make up the massive learning gaps that have grown since last March. A return to in-person learning is a massive opportunity to catch up on what we've lost.

With Baltimore County's past logistical failures, I don't trust them one bit to keep my dad safe as he returns to work in the classroom. They may claim to, but regardless of their claims the state must step in to make sure Counties protect their teachers. The Maryland Essential Workers' Protection Act will ensure that he, and millions of other essential workers, are kept safe from the dangers of a deadly pandemic. I want my dad to be guaranteed a safe and hygienic workplace so he can continue educating at such a critical stage in children's development. If (or when) BCPS fails to protect him, he deserves to protect himself by refusing dangerous work. Right now, BCPS teachers do not have the option to teach fully virtually during the pandemic – an unacceptable condition, especially for teachers with underlying health conditions.

As teachers go back in the classroom, it's more important than ever that they – and all essential workers – are protected by state law. For months we have been praising essential workers – making signs, saying thank you, and giving Super Bowl tickets to those who have put their lives on the line so Maryland can stay open. All of these thank-yous mean absolutely nothing unless they are backed up by action. The MDEWPA is an essential to showing our essential workers that we don't just claim to care about them. We must pass this Act to keep Maryland open for business, and to keep millions of essential workers safe and healthy.

Sincerely,  
Elliott Morton  
Constituent, District 42A