

Testimony in Support of HB782 Public Schools – Purple Star Schools Program - Establishment
February 3, 2022

Dear House Ways and Means Committee Members,

For the last 10 years our children have attended several schools throughout our nation which includes DoDEA and public schools. We've experienced many ups and downs including 4 deployments and endless TDY. Being away from our families makes us rely more on our community, which includes having the support of our children's schools.

In 2017 my husband deployed while stationed in Aberdeen Proving Ground. At the time our daughter was in 4th grade and our son was in kindergarten. Without a doubt this was the hardest deployment we've experienced as a family. Our kids were old enough to feel the emptiness and pain of this process, which caused them to have a change in behavior. Our daughter would cry almost every day whenever she thought of her dad in school which made her an easy target to be bullied. Our son became angry; he was defiant at home because "daddy left". At first, I didn't want to notify the school of the change in our household; I was afraid it would lead to pity or favoritism. But as their behavior kept changing, I reached out to their teachers, principal and assistant principal. They allowed me to hold a phone during an Honor Roll ceremony so my husband could facetime and watch our daughter receive her certificate. The school counselor allowed our son in her office so he could have lunch with his dad. I can continue mentioning several examples of how accommodating, kind and loving this school was in order to make our kids feel a sense of normalcy. In our case, we got lucky because this school already had a nurturing environment and although they were not all familiar with deployments, they stepped up to the challenge. To our advantage our daughter's teacher and assistant principal were also military children, which was extremely beneficial.

Moving every two to three years and crossing state lines creates a lot of uncertainty and expectations for military families. The decision to purchase or rent a home is based on certain factors offered by the school district. We become detectives: researching, asking for the community's input, studying the school district's website and looking for key factors to help us make an informed decision.

In an ideal scenario, each school would have an understanding of our children's needs, have trained personnel to guide them when needed and create spaces for the military families to interact and bond. Yes, each military installation has several programs in place for our needs, but why not carry this support system outside the gates. Some military installations like Aberdeen Proving Ground do not have a DoDEA school, which means our children interact on a regular basis with classmates, friends and faculty that might be unaware of their unique situation.

That's where **Purple Star Schools** comes in. This program helps schools provide educational and social-emotional support to our children when transitioning to their new community. It facilitates materials for professional development and guides each school to better understand our children. The **Purple Star School** designation would be the distinction Maryland schools need in order for our military families to feel reassured, and to facilitate a sense of normalcy for our children.

Sincerely,



Melissa I. Frasqueri Santiago
Military Spouse

