FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS – SB0981

SB0891 - LOCAL CYBERSECURITY PREPAREDNESS AND LOCAL CYBERSECURITY SUPPORT FUND - ALTERATIONS

EDUCATION, ENERGY AND THE ENVIRONMENT

MARCH 7, 2024

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan and Members of the Committee:

My name is Ben Yelin, and I am the Program Director for Public Policy & External Affairs at the University of Maryland Center for Health and Homeland Security. I also served as the co-chair, with Senator Hester, of the Ad Hoc Subcommittee of the Maryland Cybersecurity Council on State and Local Cybersecurity. We recommended in our 2021 study that every unit of local government in Maryland conduct regular cybersecurity assessments. The General Assembly required these assessments in the 2022 cybersecurity reform legislative package.

In the years since we conducted the study and since the legislation was enacted, schools have made remarkable progress with limited resources. SB0981 will further these efforts by requiring school systems, by July 1, 2025, to take important steps to improve their cyber hygiene. First, the bill would require schools to institute a multi-factor authentication (MFA) requirement for all staff. As the sponsor has noted, current assessments indicate that only a quarter of school employees, and a smaller percentage of privileged users, currently use MFA. These days, all software has MFA as a standard feature, so this requirement would not impose an additional cost burden on school districts. The bill would also require schools to implement endpoint detection and response on all school-issued devices accessed by employees and would require school systems to invest in network monitoring. For some school districts that have not already instituted these measures, the latter requirements will add a cost burden. Thankfully, SB0981 permits the Governor to include additional money in the Local Cybersecurity Report Fund to help implement these changes, and to address the most critical gap we have in school systems, which is that many of them suffer from significant staffing shortages.

The investments in this bill reflect the vision of our 2021 study and will help schools confront increasing cybersecurity threats while also mitigating the financial burden of improving network resilience. For these reasons, we respectfully request a **favorable report** on SB0981.