



**FAVORABLE  
Senate Bill 1043  
Education – Public School Employers and Employees – Subcontracting for  
Services**

**Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee  
March 6, 2024**

**Ben Schmitt  
President**

Good afternoon Chair, Vice Chair, and members of the Committee my name is Ben Schmitt, and I'm the President of the Howard County Education Association. Before serving in this role, I was an Elementary Art Teacher for 25 years.

I'm here today to lend our union's strong support for SB1043 and urge a favorable report on the bill. Several years ago HCPSS outsourced positions called 'student assistants' covered by our union contract. These essential support staff provide close, direct adult supervision of children with a range of disabilities. HCPSS has a panoply of companies who provide temporary services to kids with disabilities. The largest such group are universally known as "TE's," or Temporary Employees who are paid lower wages, receive no benefits, receive little training, and are not paid at all if their student is absent. There are more than 300 of them currently in our system. If those positions were converted to HCSPSS student assistants, they would immediately receive better benefits, higher wages, more job protection, more training to support these students, and the students would likely receive better services. SB1043 levels the playing field for public school employees by requiring subcontractors to pay the same wage to their employees as HCPSS.

If School Systems can contract out the work of our support staff, what stops them from contracting out the work of Teachers? They already do. HCPSS also subcontracts speech services, which creates enormous challenges for our speech pathologists. While the subcontracted SLP's may work remotely, they often are not serving the neediest students. That leaves our members faced with serving the children with the most profound disabilities. Not only that, but when parents have concerns or complaints, it is our members, not the

subcontracted workers who deal with those concerns, which creates extra work for our members.

This year, Howard County schools hired a contractor which will handle all of our bus routes within 3 years, a California company that receives private investment funding from venture capitalists all over the world. What happened when Zum took over was widely documented in local media. The drivers Zum promised to deliver never showed and they ended up flying people in from as far away as Seattle. Routes they promised would be smooth were anything but.

The people left holding the bag here were scared students, frustrated parents, and in many cases, educators who were made to stay at school long after their day ended because the scheduled buses never arrived. Taxpayers were promised smooth and efficient services. We got chaos and confusion instead. As Zum's profits from taxpayers go up, that necessarily comes at the expense of state and local funds that we should be using to implement the Blueprint.

Please don't let these contractors undermine the hard work this Senate has done to pass and fund the Blueprint.

For these and many other reasons, **I urge a favorable report on SB1043.**