

Written Testimony for HB 1373
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I cannot begin to express my disappointment and frustration with my government. Can you please ask yourself, *why is it, that in 2024, a time when diversity and inclusion is at the forefront of any discussion, are homeschooled children not afforded the opportunity to play sports or participate in extra-curricular activities alongside their public school peers?*

If your answer is anything other than *that needs to change*, then your answer is wrong.

My hope is that the delegation wants what is best for kids, after all, isn't that part of every candidate's promise when running for public office? I can assure you that upon hearing this promise, every constituent is skeptical.

I shouldn't have to tell you that the homeschooling community is on the rise across the country. It's also on the rise in Maryland. I also shouldn't have to explain that there are as many reasons to homeschool as there are homeschooling families. Personally, my reasons for homeschooling have grown over the years, but my original reason (and still the number one today) was simply, I wanted to.

I am a homeschooling mom of five children. We began our journey sixteen years ago when my daughter was starting third grade – she is now a college graduate, has a professional job, is settling on a new house this week, and is engaged to be married this year. Also important to note about her is that she was a competitive baton twirler for eighteen years. Her sport was rigorous and brought countless opportunities – hard work, perseverance, friendships, relationships with coaches, respect for judges and authority, world travel, sportsmanship, winning and losing, and time management. Thankfully, she didn't need to attend formal school to twirl, and homeschooling allowed her the flexibility to train in order to reach her full athletic potential. She is now retired and can look back and know that she was a world champion AND academically successful.

I have three more kids, a 5th and 3rd grader and a kindergartener. They all excel in our homeschool, participate in a co-op, and play sports. As of now, youth and travel organizations are serving them well. I predict that they will continue on the same athletic path as their oldest sister and their older brother, who I wish to tell you about next.

My son, Caleb, is finishing 8th grade as a homeschooler. Caleb is a multisport athlete playing baseball, basketball, and football. As a youth player, he has played on many teams, winning numerous team championships and individual awards. He competed in the Cal Ripken Major/70 World Series in 2022 and has been a part of the championship team, Huntingtown Hurricanes, for the last three seasons. I have enjoyed every minute of his time in youth sports.

In the fall, Caleb will be starting 9th grade. As his mom, I am crushed that our family has been forced to make a very tough decision on his high school future. We've decided to enroll him in school so he can play football, the sport he loves and excels in. I don't take the word *unfair* lightly as it is too often misused. But in our case, and many others, the situation is exactly that, unfair.

It is absolutely unfair that children in the state of Maryland have the legal right to educate at home but are prohibited to play sports or participate in activities through the public school.

Quickly, I'll note some important points to consider.

- These activities are “extra” and are supported by our tax dollars.
- Homeschoolers follow the laws set forth in COMAR.
- Military families who have orders to move from a right to play state to Maryland are faced with a choice they shouldn't have to make.
- Sports and activities are part of a child's overall well-being and learning experience.
- Not every sport or activity is offered outside of school and/or not at the competitive level a child desires, especially once at the high school level (examples are football and marching band).
- Kids are looking to advance their sport/activity past the high school level. For some this means college. As homeschoolers, students are required to follow strict NCAA requirements if they wish to continue in college. My point is these kids are well invested in their homeschooling academics in order to play in college.

Our state has completely forced families to either give up homeschooling to have access to certain sports/activities or give up the sport/activity to homeschool.

This idea of either/or is nonsense.

Tell me how 39 states allow access to public school, but Maryland does not? I have researched state by state to find out their laws or policies, and have, to the best of my knowledge and understanding determined that there are indeed 39 states that give homeschoolers public school access in some capacity.

Why can't Maryland do the same? Is it money? The teachers' unions? Politics as usual? Anti-homeschool? Maryland could give the power to decide over to the counties or individual school districts. There are a number of ways to implement this.

I have been very vocal in my homeschool community about this issue and took charge this time around. Although House Bill 1373 is not ideal, it's a start. I do not understand all the red tape, paper pushing, and politicking that goes into something so simple like opening the door for all children, but I digress. This is bureaucracy.

I have tried to speak with representatives around the state, and only one took the time to invite me and my fellow homeschool parents to sit down with him. My own delegate from my district did not give me thirty minutes of his time. So, with that, I would like to thank Delegate Mark Fisher for his time, generosity, and genuine concern for our plight.

In closing, I ask that you find HB 1373 favorable and see this bill through. It may be too late for my son, but there are many others coming up behind him that deserve better. I am very proud of Caleb's athletic and academic achievements. I know he will go on to do great things in high school; I wish he could have had the option to do it as a homeschooler. I am happy to answer questions or debate this issue as well as assist in the workgroup.