

Written Testimony for HB 1373 –

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First and foremost, I would like to express my gratitude to Delegate Mark Fisher for his time, attention, thoughts, and for scheduling this hearing for HB 1373.

Unlike a lot of homeschool families, we are fairly new to the scene. I have a 23-year-old daughter who attended a faith based private school through elementary school, and then an Anne Arundel Charter School from middle school until she graduated – a year early, I might add. She was active in sports in elementary and middle school, but that focus veered off as she hit her teens years. Nonetheless, we never realized how lucky we were to be able to afford her the opportunity to return to sports at any given time during her educational years.

My two younger children, ages 11 and 13, as of the date of this testimony, in grades 6th and 8th respectively, both attended public school all through elementary, and for my 8th grader half of her middle school education. Our reasons to homeschool, like many others, are various and personal. We have met many wonderful other homeschool families with similar ideologies, as well as polar opposite ideologies, secular and faith based, and every thing in between. What we all have in common is that we have all chosen to homeschool our children ultimately simply because “we could.”

Regardless of our reasons for homeschooling, just like families who choose traditional schools – public and/or private – we all adhere to COMAR (Codes of Maryland) Regulations and we all pay our taxes to the State of Maryland towards education. However, our children are not able to reap any of the benefits that traditional education families get, primarily in regards to extracurricular activities.

My 11-year-old plays football, baseball, and also martial arts (Brazilian Jui Jitsu, to be specific). At this point in time, we make due with recreation and travel leagues, and it suffices. Baseball is his passion, and he has played baseball since he was 6-years-old. He showed up on the field with a natural instinct, talent and love for the game, and was consistently invited to join each season’s all-star team, until we were invited to join his choice of one of three travel teams. His choice team will be one of the teams representing his home state of Maryland at Cooperstown All Star Village this summer along side many other teams from many other states. This all sounds great in the moment, but as a parent, I have no choice but to look down the road to see where his natural skills, intuition and love of baseball will take him, and at this point, it looks like the road stops when he hits 14. Most rec teams stop at that age as players start playing for their local high schools. My son will not have that opportunity. Rather, he will have to buy a ticket to cheer on his childhood best friends, who he has known and played ball with since elementary school, but ***He will be excluded.*** Not by his peers, his friends, or the coaches, but by his own government. The ones that are supposed to protect him and his choices and rights.

This realization his future in athletics is contradictory to what they were taught both in school: “Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility for all” Unless one is a homeschooled child. Then they are afforded none of those protections. To what benefit or detriment? It was suggested that there is concern that opening interscholastic activities up to homeschooled student raises the risk that the school districts will be inundated with such students, “taking away opportunities” from actual students. My response to this is twofold –

- 1.) No. In all actuality most homeschool families would more than likely prefer to avoid the schools, if we are being honest, whatever their reason(s) is/are. It is more likely that the homeschool students that express interest in an interscholastic or extracurricular activity takes their activity serious enough to attempt inclusion.
- 2.) Any true athlete, at that age group, understands that only the best are offered a spot – one must try out and prove their worth, show that they can be an asset to the team. Whether the tryouts are through a recreational league, a travel league, or a school league, the process remains the same. The options pool is slightly expanded, but only the best will represent the school.

The opposition may offer various “problems” as to why homeschooled students should remain barred from interscholastic activities, but as a homeschool parent, I can offer various “solutions.”

The benefits of allowing homeschool students to participate in interscholastic activities are far greater, and ultimately to the benefit of the children. ***Primarily, truly demonstrating diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility; being taught that ideology by example, as recipients.***

I genuinely hope that the General Assembly will find the benefits of HB1373 favorable to the homeschooled children of Maryland and pass it. I look forward to the day that Maryland joins ranks as the 42nd state to allow homeschool students to play ball. Our only alternative would be to uproot from this place we have called home for twenty-two (22) years, the only home my younger homeschooled children have ever known, where my business is licensed, and where we pay many taxes, to afford them an opportunity that this State of Maryland chooses to withhold from them. As any parent would, I will make whatever choices are necessary to ensure my children are given equal opportunities as their peers.