

SB845 Written Testimony – Ways and Means Committee
(3/26 at 1:00 PM) Local Education Agencies - Educator Screening - NASDTEC Clearinghouse
Jonah Spiegelman - Pikesville High School Student

Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins, and members of the Ways and Means Committee:

My name is Jonah Spiegelman, I am a senior at Pikesville High School in Baltimore County, and I am here to respectfully request a favorable report on Senate Bill 845.

This bill was introduced because of events that took place at my school last year. I am sitting before you today to tell you my experience with what occurred, and how this bill will prevent anything similar from occurring in the future. As Pikesville's mascot, I had become very close with my principal as we planned dozens of appearances starting early in my freshman year. By winter of 2024, I had formed a very strong relationship with my principal and we frequently talked as we passed in the hallway about school stuff, or sports, or any other casual topic.

However, I was woken up around midnight on January 15, 2024 to a flurry of messages from classmates asking *if I had heard it*. Initially, I didn't understand what "it" was, but once someone sent me the video, I realized that everyone was referring to a 45 second audio file that sounded like my principal going on a racist, homophobic, and anti-semitic rant about students, staff, and community members. I was blown away thinking that someone I knew would say things of this nature. The entire school was in shock, the principal was removed, and I showed up to school just hours later to several news stations at my school covering the event.

It took until late April for us to learn that our school's athletic director was accused of creating the audio clip using artificial intelligence and was arrested. While the principal **did** get a new job, his reputation has been irreversibly tarnished because of the athletic director, a man who got a job in my school, but never should have been hired in the first place. It was proven that he lied on his job application about his past experiences and it was reported that he was flagged several times by the organization that this bill looks to make a requirement as a risk for schools. The passing of this bill will give school systems throughout Maryland one more tool to screen people who should never get through the vetting process, and prevent them from access to our schools.

Accordingly, I respectfully encourage a favorable report on SB845 from this committee. Thank you for your time.