

SB218- State Superintendent Emergency Powers

Oppose

Alliance for Science Based Policy

Good afternoon Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan and Members of the EEE Committee,

My name is Megan Montgomery, and I am submitting testimony on behalf of the Alliance for Science Based Policy. We write to oppose SB-218, authorizing the State Superintendent to be allowed to exercise Emergency Powers.

Emergency Powers belong in the hands of the Governor as an elected official and people's representative here in Maryland. The State Superintendent, as an unelected gubernatorial appointee who does not interact with or engage with our citizens, is an appropriate advisor to the Governor and should remain so- but is NOT an appropriate party to wield such immense power. This law would remove that vital feedback loop from the citizens to our elected Governor on policy determinations that impact our daily lives.

We saw that under the last Republican Gubernatorial Administration; emergency powers were enacted to close schools during the Covid-19 pandemic. While the initial response to temporarily close schools was the right decision to protect the health and safety of all the citizens in the state, we also saw that as the closures went on (far longer than in jurisdictions around us), the Administration ignored the clear and well established science regarding juvenile cognitive, social and emotional development and the need to counterbalance school closures against multiple complex metrics for health and wellness. Our children continue to struggle with delays and unmet mental health hygiene needs because of our overly long school closures.

We continue to see lasting negative academic impacts to Maryland children from the excessively long school closures of 2020-2021 as well. Namely, our own high school students continue to struggle to gain acceptance into the University of Maryland system as compared with students from jurisdictions with shorter Covid-19 school closures. Our current 8th grade test scores are STILL truly abysmal, with less than 10% of 8th graders showing proficiency in math, and less than 50% demonstrating proficiency in reading. We must have elected officials who answer to the people of the state responsible for making

these very difficult and complicated decisions weighing different needs and different scientific metrics.

The recommendations made by the previous republican Administration were not based on sound science by the end, and moving this decision making out of the hands of the Governor would encourage any future Administration's to potentially politicize the science once again by pushing these life altering decisions into the hands of an unelected official. We were an outlier in the length of time we remained closed and under emergency powers, and we must ensure that anyone with the capability to invoke these powers is accessible and answerable to the citizens of this state.

For these reasons, we urge this committee to recommend an unfavorable report on SB218.