



SB 218/HB 288- Unfavorable

The Love Maryland PAC has several concerns with this legislation, and we ask that the committee give an Unfavorable report to the bill as it is giving away the power of the Governor and the elected members of the legislature to those who are unelected by the people of our great state.

The Love Maryland PAC has over 3600 members statewide, many of whom are parents of young children. Our focus since 2015, has been making Maryland the kind of place that families LOVE to live in and raise their children.

During the COVID-19 Pandemic, schools in Maryland and across the nation were closed in many areas for a significant period of time. As we had never seen a pandemic of this magnitude in modern history, the response of many states and countries was extremely aggressive. Since then, however, research has analyzed the outcomes of those extreme responses and what we have learned has been devastating. I would like to read directly from a peer-reviewed May 2024 study that analyzed the impacts, Dr. Elizabeth Wolf, et al writes:

“Although most children with SARS-CoV-2 do not become severely ill or develop long-term sequelae from the virus, ([Haddad et al., 2022](#); [Wald et al., 2021](#)) the indirect effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on children have been profound....School closure lowered math and reading test scores, especially in predominantly Black communities ([Jack et al., 2023](#)) and these test scores have not yet recovered ([Halloran et al., 2023](#)).”

A study from an August 2020 peer-reviewed study that looked at reports of child abuse during closures, Dr. Jason Baron, et al writes:

“While one would expect the financial, mental, and physical stress due to COVID-19 to result in additional child maltreatment cases, we find that the actual number of reported allegations was approximately 15,000 lower (27%) than expected for these two months.”

The apparent DECLINE in child abuse, says the authors, is not because children stopped being abused, but because they were locked out of the schools that were able to see the signs of abuse and report them. These children were suffering in silence with their abusers for months or years even.

As of 2019-2020 school year, there were 6,126 “whereabouts unknown” children in 7-12 grade in Maryland schools. That number is now barely under 11,000 “whereabouts unknown” children, despite declining overall enrollment in Maryland public schools. Where are these children and whose caring for them?

Someone who has not been elected to represent the people should never have the power to cause the kind of harm felt by the children of Maryland in recent years. It is a distinct authority that should be exclusively

reserved for you all and the Governor alone. You are closest to the people. You are the ones we have elected to make these impactful decisions on our lives.

With respect, The Love Maryland PAC strongly urges that you return an unfavorable report on HB288/SB218.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Catherine Garrett". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first letter of each word being capitalized and larger than the others.

Catherine Garrett

Chair,

Love Maryland PAC