

Written Support for Bill HB0396
Rayka M. Service, HCASC Student Committee Member

On behalf of the Howard County Association of Student Councils, I express my sincere gratitude for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of HB0396, a bill that aims to strengthen educational and professional supports for children under the protection of child care programs. Children in such programs often face disparities in educational attainment because academic support is inconsistent and schooling is disrupted by the instability of their living situations. In the face of such discrepancies, HB396 aims to address these gaps by raising the standard for Youth Care Practitioners to ensure they take on active yet accountable roles in each child's academic development. This bill recognizes how truly fundamental educational stability is in securing long-term success. It is imperative that we take the chance to uplift fellow students in vulnerable situations through the collective support of this bill.

HCASC takes this stance on HB0396 because we work to represent more than 57,000 students across the Howard County community. With such a diverse student body, we gain varied perspectives that show us how crucial it is to accommodate all students. On that note, HB0396 is notable in its holistic approach towards academic aid, as not only does it look towards minimizing delays in the transition of school records, providing tutoring services, and allotting time for students to study, but the bill takes into account the community school cultivates, by requiring caretakers to provide constant access to extracurricular activities for their students. These factors illustrate exactly why HCASC considers HB0396 as a necessary means towards the fostering of student development within Maryland.

Moreover, HB0396 recognizes the diversity in how we learn and extends such care to students with special needs. HB0396 protects IEPs, 504 plans, and Behavioral Intervention Plans by requiring caretakers to monitor their fulfillment. At the same time, certification requirements are modernized as they will be expected to become certified in suicide prevention, child abuse and neglect identification, and other forms of trauma-informed care— necessary skills to meet a wide variety of needs.

HB0396 vows to establish that residential child care programs meet the exact standards we would hold for any other caregiver. No child's education should be overlooked in the pursuit of improved living conditions, and HB0396 would be an incredible step towards achieving educational stability and professional growth for all students.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Rayka Magalhaes Service