

February 21, 2020

Member of the Ways and Means Committee:

HB675 – Brynleigh's Act

I'm a constituent, writing in support of the Brynleigh Act, sponsored by Senator Young in the Senate (SB 549) and Delegate Kerr in the House (HB 675), which will have a hearing in the Ways and Means Committee next week. This state legislation would ensure that all school personnel are not only prepared, but can recognize and respond appropriately and efficiently to students experiencing seizures.

I was a teacher in Baltimore County Public Schools and am also someone living with epilepsy. When going to professional development, many health conditions such as heart attack, drug overdoses, and broken bones, were discussed, as well as how to go about treating them. One condition not even mentioned was epilepsy. I know how common epilepsy is, and I feel as though it should be covered in medical training. It was not just important for someone to know that seizures are common, but also to know how to help. Many seizures, including mine, are not tonic-clonic and may not immediately be recognized as such. It is important that school staff has the training to recognize these seizures as they are happening, so that the individual having the seizure can get the help they need.

Approximately 1 in 26 people will develop epilepsy in their lifetime, 1 in 10 people will have a single seizure in their lifetime, and approximately 7,900 Maryland children currently have an active epilepsy diagnosis, but there is only one nurse per 913 students. It is of vital importance that school staff know how to recognize and respond to a seizure should one occur in their classroom, school bus, or specialized area. Quick response to a seizure cannot wait for a nurse to arrive. It is not enough for school nurses to be the only ones with that training. Many students will have their first seizure while in school, so this is not just a matter of following a plan that is already in place. Some will have seizures in front of their classmates; when personnel are able to respond calmly and knowledgeably it makes the experience safer and less scary for everyone.

The Brynleigh Act will ensure that all school personnel have some familiarity with seizure recognition, and in doing so, will make all our children safer in their school environment. Five other states have passed similar bills, and Pennsylvania and Virginia are both taking it up this session. We hope that Maryland will, as always, lead by example. Please support this legislation, for my family and others like us.

I urge a favorable report on HB675.

Sincerely,

Grace Witkowski

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