

Testimony on House Bill 1195, an Act concerning County Boards of Education and Computer Science Courses

Submitted to the Maryland House Committee on Ways and Means

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My name is Leanna Eldridge and I am a junior at Great Mills High School in St. Mary's County. I am a Girls Who Code member and I am asking you to support House Bill 1195.

Until this year, I never had the opportunity to take a computer science class. I recently learned that Maryland is among a group of states working to change this reality for the better - to allow more K-12 students to be educated in computer science.

I've been told by younger students that our eighth graders, freshmen, and sophomores now have access to computer science in their curriculum. I feel lucky knowing there are now young people in my county who have the opportunity to take computer science classes.

But, in my experience, most of the students in these classes are boys. And, if not, these classes are limited to a select group of students, such as students already enrolled in STEM or advanced-level classes.

Outside of my personal experience and what others have told me, I have no way of knowing if the county has had the chance to add more computer science classes. I have no way of knowing if young women and girls from any grade have the chance to enroll in these courses. That's why I believe it is so important to have a method to track the students interested in or taking computer science classes.

As a young girl with computer science related aspirations, I cannot tell you how challenging it has been to find opportunities to take classes or join clubs dedicated to teaching young people about computer science. I never knew there were other young women who wanted to learn to code or were interested in tech until I joined both Girls Who Code and the Computer and Cyber club.

Since joining these clubs, I have been able to teach at or apply for computer science education events. However, it is extremely difficult to gauge public interest in these kinds of events and to find girls interested in these activities. It's even more challenging to make sure the young women who are interested in computer science actually see that these events and activities exist for them.

How can we close the increasing gender gap in computer science if school districts, and the students in them, don't know who is signing for these classes? How can we close it if we can't track how effective measures to bring more girls into computer science actually are?

By introducing a way to measure this data, everyone, including organizations, my teachers, even myself, will be put in a better position to identify what we *can* do and who we *can* provide these exciting computer science education opportunities to.