



**Board of Education of Howard County
Testimony Submitted to the Maryland Senate,
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
April 1, 2021**

**Board of Education
of Howard County**

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HB0753: FAVORABLE W/AMENDMENTS

Education - Student-Organized Peaceful Demonstrations - Student Discipline and Policy

The Board of Education of Howard County (the Board) supports **HB0753 Education - Student-Organized Peaceful Demonstrations - Student Discipline and Policy** to allow for peaceful student demonstrations in a manner that lifts up student voice and promotes civics engagement in schools.

Under HB0753, schools could not prohibit student-organized peaceful demonstrations but could impose reasonable limitations on the time and place in order to protect the health, safety, and welfare of students and school personnel, and minimize disruption to the educational environment. Local school systems would be required to adopt a policy for student demonstrations that includes guidelines for demonstrations such as manner of expression, what constitutes reasonable requirements for the time and place, and limitations on language that has the intent to harass, threaten or intimidate.

The Howard County Public School System (HCPSS) Policy 9020 Students' Rights and Responsibilities is currently under the policy review process, with the Charter issued by the Board on November 20, 2020, including a charge to include best practices in the area of student assembly. As a matter of local interest, this particular bill stemmed from a request by current and former Howard County students who are part of an effort by the Maryland Student Coalition (MSC):

<https://mdstudentcoalition.wixsite.com/demonstrations>.

While a mandate on local policy, HCPSS staff supports the goals of this bill to recognize increasing student activism and the important role student demonstrations have in allowing the next generation of leaders to express their views on societal issues and injustices. Staff would recommend the following amendments to the version as passed by the House in order to allow local school systems the most flexibility when setting appropriate parameters:

- On page 2 strike "ON A SCHOOL BUS" in line 15 – this would eliminate concerns of the safety of demonstrations on a school bus. With only one driver in most cases, there is no staff/administrator to oversee logistics and any kind of student activity could be distracting for the driver.
- On page 3 after line 11, add "NOTHING IN THIS SECTION PROHIBITS A SCHOOL SYSTEM FROM IMPOSING DISCIPLINARY MEASURES"

FOR VIOLATIONS OF LOCAL POLICY OR STUDENT CODE OF CONDUCT FOR ACTIONS OTHER THAN PARTICIPATION IN A STUDENT-ORGANIZED PEACEFUL DEMONSTRATION AS OUTLINED IN SUBSECTION (E)” – while the sponsor has indicated such measures are still available to schools, an addition here would clarify subsection D and E do not limit all such authority if a student claims their actions were in connection with the demonstration.

An additional concern regarding “48 hour” notification of intent to hold a student-organized peaceful demonstration - as this could mean notification is permissible on a non-school day when 48 hours falls over the weekend or a holiday - has been addressed in amendments from the House, with the replacement language “WITHIN A REASONABLE AMOUNT OF TIME,” which the Board supports.

For these reasons, we urge a FAVORABLE report of HB0753 from this Committee with the inclusion of the suggested amendments. The Board also commend the efforts of the youth leaders in our county who turned their passion for student rights into this legislative movement.