

Testimony in Support of SB231
Public Schools - Cyber Safety Guide and Training Course
- Development, Implementation, and Reporting

January 27, 2021

Good day, Chair Pinsky, Vice Chair Kagan, and members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee. Thank you for allowing me to speak with you regarding SB231 and the development of a Cyber Safety Guide and Training Course for our public schools.

My name is Laurie Ressler, and I am the Technical Assistant for Media Technical Services in the Office of Instructional Technology and Library Media for the Howard County Public School System. I am a state-certified media specialist for grades K through 12, and I have taught library media and technology in Howard County elementary schools since 2011. I am speaking today as a professional educator and private citizen, and my opinions do not reflect those of the Howard County Public School System.

I have personally witnessed the explosive growth in the use of technology by our students at an increasingly younger age over the past ten years. This growth has been accelerated by the pandemic and virtual learning. But instruction in cyber safety and digital citizenship isn't something we just started doing since covid became our new normal. I'm extremely proud of the instruction I have helped create and implement on these subjects over the past decade. Our Office of Instructional Technology and Library Media has developed curricula with a solid grounding in best practices and current pedagogy for our K through 5 students in weekly Technology and Media classes, and for our secondary students through the Health and Library Media programs. This instruction continues virtually. Our lessons meet not only Maryland digital learning standards, but also the standards of the International Society for Technology in Education and the American Association of School Librarians. Throughout the pandemic, my office has provided weekly virtual professional development so every Howard County technology teacher and media specialist is ready to help each student to become a safe, thoughtful, and productive digital citizen. Every child in Maryland deserves such a well-planned and -implemented learning experience.

We all want to ensure the safety and emotional and mental well-being of our students when using digital tools. But beyond that, we want our students to become more than just passive consumers of technology. We want them to strive to be critical thinkers and ethical creators and collaborators in our digital world. Everything we do drives toward that goal.

To this, the creation at the state level of a cyber safety guide and training program, drawing on the research of child psychology and technology experts, and made available to all public school jurisdictions, would be a valuable supplement for us as educators to draw upon as we continue to refine and improve our cyber safety and digital citizenship programs. I respectfully ask that you all support me and my fellow technology and media teachers across Maryland by supporting the passage of SB231. Thank you very much.