

# **SB 921:**

**County Boards of Education - Accessibility Standards - Digital Tools  
(Nonvisual Access Accountability Act for Grades K-12 Education)**

Senator Clarence Lam  
District 12

# What is the problem?

- COVID-19 virtual public school learning environments are exacerbating serious failings in accessibility for students and parents with disabilities.
  - Increased school use of inaccessible instructional technologies
  - Blind students in grades K-12 cannot access their educational content
- State and federal law mandate accessibility of information and communication technology (ICT,) digital content, and services.
- Local school systems and the MSDE have not enforced accessibility requirements in purchasing or implementing technologies; not prohibiting staff from using inaccessible materials they find on their own.
- Local school systems and MSDE have no accountability for accessibility.

# What does SB 921 do?

- Establishes local procurement process accountability, requiring vendors to submit an Accessibility Conformance Report
- Requires a vision services representative to be a part of the evaluation team for bids
- Requires counties to purchase only accessible digital tools as defined by Federal Law
- Fines vendors who misrepresent or do not repair inaccessible platforms
- Requires local jurisdictions to provide accessibility information on their websites



# How SB 921 helps?

- Creates necessary school system accountability to ensure nonvisual access to information & communication technology, as required by law
- Vendors are more accountable, fined if fail to meet accessibility standards
- Incorporating accessibility into technology is more cost effective in the initial project planning stages than it is when it is done retroactively



# Witness Testimony on Accessibility Issues

- Schools told parents of blind children adaptive technology used by the blind would be available to students, but programs being read were inaccessible.
  - In Howard County, blind students are unable to participate in high school math classes because the program GEOGEBRA is not accessible
  - Other students had trouble participating in classes on KAHOOT, which requires an understanding of color.
  - A Mom in Frederick, who is herself blind, cannot get curriculum to load onto her screen reader and is thus unable to help her children with their work during virtual school.
- Some districts issued Chromebooks, not accessible with screen readers.

# Sponsor Amendment (*SB0921/203023/1*):

1. Requires a vendor to include an indemnification clause in the contract for ICT, which will increase the vendor's commitment to accessibility. Taxpayers should not pay for inaccessible products or mistakes that vendors may make.
2. Changes the consultant from a person in the Division of Rehabilitation Services to the Blindness Specialist in the Division of Early Intervention and Special Education Services, which is part of the Maryland State Department of Education, who work with K-12 students, while the Division of Rehabilitation Services primarily works with adults to prepare them for the world of work.