

March 5, 2021

Bill: SB0915

STUDENT TESTIMONY

Submitted by: Jennifer Zheng, 12th Grade Student, Baltimore Polytechnic Institute

To: Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

Subject: [SB0915](#) -The Blueprint for Maryland's Future - Performance Standards - Clarifications

POSITION: Support

COMMITTEE: [Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee](#)

My name is Jennifer Zheng, 12th grade student at Baltimore Polytechnic Institute and member of the Baltimore Youth Arts Advocacy Council, a program of Arts Every Day. I strongly support the approval of SB 915-The Blueprint for Maryland's Future-Performance Standards-Clarifications as a technical amendment to HB1300-Blueprint for Maryland's Future to clarify the use of the term "performance standards" by ensuring that the foundation of a world-class education system in Maryland under the Blueprint for Maryland's Future for education will require that is sufficient to enable students to achieve the State's performance standards, as required in [Maryland COMAR Regulations, Title 13A State Board of Education](#).

I believe that the approval of this technical amendment will more clearly define performance standards, tied to systematic accountability throughout state and local government not just within state and local boards of education and their administrations, but through the General Assembly [Joint Committee on Administrative, Executive, and Legislative Review \(AELR\)](#) and the recently created Accountability and Implementation Board. We also believe this technical change is consistent with [Maryland's ESSA Plan approved by the USDE](#) to ensure all students within all student groups have access to a well-rounded curriculum in all grades.

Like most students and teens, I have suffered from great feelings of anxiety or other mental issues that can make us feel like there is no escape from this stressful period of time, and there is no better future. When I was in elementary and middle school, I had access to the arts and was often able to let my stress and negative emotions out through that, but high school was a different story. Of four years, most students get to take one year of the arts without much of a choice: theatre, fine arts, or music, most of which wasn't of the quality expected to benefit students due to lack of funding, teachers, or supplies. I was lucky to have a wonderful arts teacher for my last two years of school, but for those who need an outlet in the arts, it's not as easy. I want the community including parents, teachers, decision-makers, and even other students to understand right should not be a privilege; it should be a right and a resource to help us grow and cope.

According to the CDC, the most commonly diagnosed mental health issues among children aged 3 to 17 are anxiety at 7.1%, approximately 4.4 million and depression at 3.2%, approximately 1.9 million. However, this is just children who have been diagnosed, meaning there is likely even more considering the stigma surrounding mental health, and 1 in 5 children have some mental health issue, including but not limited to anxiety or depression. Additionally, the rates of children diagnosed with only either anxiety or depression have increased over the years from 5.4% in 2003 to 8% in 2007 and to 8.4% in 2011-2012.

An evaluation of a leading arts and mental health charity, Arts and Minds offering weekly arts classes for the past seven years have revealed a 71% decrease in feelings of anxiety and 73% fall in depression as well as 76% of the participants saying their wellbeing has increased and 69% feeling more socially included. In addition, a study conducted by Heather L. Stuckey, DEd and Jeremy Nobel, MD, MPH exploring the relationship between engagement with the creative arts and its outcomes on health, specifically the health effects of music engagement, visual arts therapy, movement-based creative expression, and expressive writing revealed engaging with creative activities can contribute toward reducing stress and depression and can serve to alleviate the burden of chronic disease due to the association between psychosocial issues such as depression and chronic stress, which contributes to negative cardiovascular outcomes along with evidence that engagement with artistic activities, either as an observer or initiator can enhance one's moods, emotions, and other psychological states.

A Poem

A dark, bottomless pit:
no light; no life in sight,
no hand to hold, no life line to pull,
stuck in a place where the walls are breaking,
the floor shaking, and me? Trembling.
I wasn't wandering. No.
I was lost. Not misdirection though.
Just simply, no where to go.
Crippling anxiety; all eyes on me.
Is there anywhere to escape to?
Anyway to be free?
Everywhere I turn and everywhere I look,
it feels like a trap waiting to consume me.
Friends and family start feeling like threats.
They ask if I'm ok, but what can I say?
I open my mouth try to make a sound,
But there's no noise.
Nothing but tears streaming down my face.
Nothing but the fast beating of my uncontrollable heart.
Nothing but my sweat glands seemingly working overtime.
But... at my lowest point and darkest time,
When words can not express how I feel,
when I'm scared of speaking from my heart,
when I don't even know what I want to say,
art looked at me, it smiled, reached out it's hand,
and said, "I will help you.
Use me to show them,
show them what you feel,
what you think,
what you want,
what you need,
but most importantly,
who you are"

