

SB0941 - Virtual Schools - FAV - Akindele Omotosho

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Position: FAV

Testimony offered on behalf of:

AKINDELE OMOTOSHO

IN SUPPORT OF:

SB0941 – Primary and Secondary Education – Virtual Schools – Alterations

Senate Education, Health and Economic Affairs Committee

Hearing 3/18/2021 at 1:00 PM

My name is Akindele Omotosho. I am a freshman student at Pearson Online Academy here in Maryland. Prior to attending Pearson Online Academy, I was homeschooled since I was in third grade. My experience with Pearson Online Academy so far has been wonderful.

I think it is incredible how interactive each teacher is and how they make the work interesting. I also like being able to be in clubs at the school like the Diversity Club where we talk about important topics in our world.

In my opinion, I think that Pearson Online Academy is a great school and I have met several different people and have truly had a great experience. I love how flexible the time schedules for classes are and how each class is recorded so I can watch them later. I love having a flexible schedule because I own an online business and the workable time schedules help me to have more time to work on my business and school.

I am so thankful that I could get into the Freedom Empowerment Scholarship and that I have gotten this experience to be in this school. I think that this opportunity should be open to other students in the State of Maryland and would hope that you would **support and enact SB0941**.

Many thanks,

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SB0941 - Virtual Schools - FAV - Amy Sparks - Rose

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Position: FAV

Testimony offered on behalf of:
AMY SPARKS

IN SUPPORT OF:
SB0941 – Primary and Secondary Education – Virtual Schools – Alterations

Senate Education, Health & Economic Affairs Committee
Hearing: 3/18/2021 at 1:00 PM

My name is Amy Sparks. I am a resident of Rosedale, Maryland. I am here today to **SUPPORT SB0941 – Primary and Secondary Education – Virtual Schools – Alterations.**

About 17 years ago, I had to pull my two daughters out of the public-school system due to bullying issues. They had just finished the 5th grade. I home-schooled them for middle school. I was worried about my ability to teach them high school but then, in 9th grade we were given the opportunity to participate in the Baltimore County Online Public-school pilot program. Even though the parents and students found success in the program, this program was cancelled abruptly after one year, due to Maryland law seat requirement. **We then made the decision not to return to traditional brick and mortar school but to continue in a private online school: Pearson Online Academy.** This was the best educational experience for our daughters and family. For instance, my one daughter had ADDH and was behind in reading. Her teachers were able to add extra reading classes and by the next year she was back on grade level. As for my family, my husband worked a 2 pm to 11pm shift and Pearson Online Academy allowed him to be active in their lives and education. My daughters thrived in this virtual schooling environment and went on to receive Senatorial scholarships. I am proud of my daughters' achievements. For example, one daughter now works for John Hopkins Hospital and she designed the new Skip Viragh building's network. This brings me great pride as I am a Breast cancer warrior and I receive my follow up care in that exact building. **Pearson Online Academy overwhelming worked for her.**

As for my younger two children, currently in 9th and 12th grade, we continued with Pearson Online Academy because it worked for us and we appreciated the personalized education my children received. For example, when my son was kindergarten-age, he already knew how to count and read when he enrolled. His teacher encouraged us to enroll him in 1st grade subjects. I was concerned that he would be without some reading fundamentals, but we were able to enroll him in 1st grade math with other subjects at kindergarten level.

The flexibility and the family support Pearson Online Academy provide is amazing. When I was diagnosed with Breast cancer, my children were in about the 3rd and 5th grade. I discussed with one of my children's teachers that I might need to put them in an unknown brick and mortar school, not knowing what I would be able to handle. My son's teacher replied, "We've got you. Let us help you get through this." And they did. They ensured that my children stayed on track and gave us the needed support to continue online learning.

I am happy to announce that my son is now a senior. His entire educational experience has been virtual online school, with live support from his teachers at his fingertips. I remember when he was taking Calculus last year. He called me over and asked me for help. I looked at the screen and said, without hesitation, "Sure!" I took over his mouse and clicked the school's Live Tutor button, where a tutor was available to assist him. He is currently taking extra outside Cisco classes and will be continuing to college in the fall.

Which brings me to my baby girl. Samantha is now in the 9th grade. Another curve ball hit our family this year, just as it has affected the entire world: the COVID-19 pandemic. While I have witnessed many schools thrown into what I would call “Crisis Online Learning Mode,” in my view it is not quality virtual school learning. I am relieved to say that my children’s quality education has not missed a beat. Our biggest struggle has been reminding her friends that she is not off school. She can do her classwork any time of the day or night. 6 pm happens to be the time of day when she is most productive.

I share my story with you because, throughout these 14 years, I have repeatedly been contacted with parents to find out how they can get this high-quality virtual school option. Unfortunately, it is not available as a public school in this State, while it is available in 29 other States.

Now with Covid-19, hundreds of thousands of Maryland students are in this “Crisis Online Learning” program. You are familiar with the saying, “Rome wasn’t built in a day.” This holds true for a quality virtual school. Maryland teachers are doing their best, but quality virtual programs have spent over 20 years developing and evolving with new technology and learning best practices.

Our world may never get back to where it was. Even when in-person classes return, there will be a new group of lost children, who cannot or do not want to attend brick and mortar schools for health or various other reasons. What will these students do? Not everyone can afford a private online school, especially in these economic times.

It is your job to look ahead, to prepare Maryland. I plead with you to **vote to approve SB0941**. Can you imagine how well students in the State would have been served if this public schooling option had been available 14 years ago?

Hoping for the future,

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SB0941 - Virtual Schools - FAV - Andrea Horrocks -

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Position: FAV

SB0941 Written Testimony- Andrea Horrocks M.A.T.

IN SUPPORT OF: SB0941 – Primary and Secondary Education – Virtual Schools – Alterations

Public Hearing in Education, Health & Environmental Affairs Committee

On Thursday, March 18, 2021 at 1:30 PM

Andrea Horrocks highly supports SB0941 - Primary and Secondary Education – Virtual Schools – Alterations.

Dear Members of the Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee:

My name is Andrea Horrocks and I am writing you to urge your support for SB0941. I have been a Secondary Teacher here in the state of Maryland for almost 14 years. I have a master's degree and teaching certifications in Maryland, Texas, Tennessee, Oklahoma, and Oregon. I currently teach AP US History and standard US History, with certifications in AP US History and AP Psychology. Previous teaching experience includes Social Studies for grades 6-8, US History, World History, Economics, Psychology and Middle School Science.

My career with Pearson started as a teacher in a Connections Academy virtual school pilot program 13 ½ years ago with Baltimore County Public Schools home-schooled students, called "BCVIP." **During this program I saw quickly that virtual learning might not be for every student, but EVERY student should have the option. It was a life-saver for the students we taught in the BCVIP program, just as it has been for the many students I've subsequently taught across the United States.** The teachers and families involved in the BCVIP pilot were very disappointed when the pilot programs closed.

In my career with Pearson I have taught:

- Olympic athletes
- Actors
- Professional athletes (6-8 hours of practice each day)
- Students who were gifted in one or two subject, and on grade level for the rest
- Students living in remote places of the country who had no access to AP courses
- Students overseas
- Students with severe social anxiety or bullying history
- Home and hospital students
- Students with IEPs and 504 plans

Our high-quality virtual learning program has made a difference in the lives of these students.

I've taught AP US History for 12 years, and the course is excellent. Students are able to learn both asynchronously and synchronously. In my weekly LiveLessons, I am able to reinforce the skills needed to write very specific College Board Essays and more, to ensure student success. This course is taught completely virtually, and my students routinely perform quite well, with most receiving 3's, 4's and 5's.

3/18/2021

SB0941

Virtual learning should be of the highest quality, leveraging the latest distance learning research and best practices. From what I've seen during the pandemic, states and school districts have had to "build the plane in flight." Our students deserve better.

Like many other states, our state should be able to offer students and families state-wide virtual public-school options. If we are able to offer these options, students can choose the education model that works best for them, in programs that meet state standards.

Pearson Online & Blended Learning recommends a Favorable Committee report on SB0941.

Thank you,

Andrea Horrocks

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SB0941 - Virtual Schools - FAV - Jane St. Pierre -

Uploaded by: RASMUSSEN, DENNIS

Position: FAV

Testimony offered on behalf of:
JANE C. ST. PIERRE

IN SUPPORT OF:
SB0941 – Primary and Secondary Education – Virtual Schools – Alterations

Senate Education, Health & Economic Affairs Committee
Hearing: 3/18/2012 at 1:00 PM

Good morning Mister Chairman and Honorable members of the Education, Health & Economic Affairs Committee. I am here to provide written testimony in **FAVOR of SB0941 - Primary and Secondary Education – Virtual Schools – Alterations.**

My name is Jane St. Pierre. I am a certified teacher (grades pre-k through 8th) in the State of Louisiana with 23 years of teaching experience in both public and private schools. My advocacy for online education, despite my career in brick-and-mortar settings, is the result of my son's difficult journey to the acquisition of a high school diploma.

My son was diagnosed with ADHD, dyslexia, dysgraphia, and OCD. School was a struggle. Staying seated and on task were problematic from an ADHD perspective. OCD complicated matters by offering further focusing distractions. Medication certainly helped, but the most effective ones that helped him concentrate caused exhausting tics. So, we chose a medication that gave some relief, but his ability to focus was still compromised. Dyslexia and dysgraphia made note taking and test taking areas of anxiety.

He navigated through the lower grades well. He would put in many extra hours at the kitchen table every night with homework and studying for tests. He would begin studying for a test as soon as the units were introduced, adding new study cards each night. "Cramming," which worked for many of his schoolmates, was completely ineffective for him. In total, he would likely average 5-6 hours of studying for each test (and this was at the elementary grade level), over several weeks. This preparation resulted in unpredictable test scores – sometimes A's, but more often much lower. He often verbalized frustration over the fact that everyone else seemed to work less than he did yet outperform him. The two private schools in which he was enrolled in high school refused to grant the accommodations promised at enrollment. As his parent and educational champion, I became incredibly frustrated. Communicating with the school, begging for accommodations and support, fighting for him when he was disciplined for side effects such as falling asleep in class (because of increased anxiety medication which was reported to the school), and forfeiting practically all family quality time trying to keep him academically afloat had me weary and nearing hopeless. By the beginning of 10th grade, my son begged me to let him drop out of school. It was a spirit-crushing request.

I am so grateful to his psychiatrist who advised during a phone call placed in the evening that perhaps a radical change would be helpful rather than increased medication. It was obvious that my son's total being was compromised in a traditional school setting. **The cure – I enrolled him in a private online school based out of Maryland (then known as International Connections Academy and presently named Pearson Online Academy). Our lives changed.** He could copy lesson notes rather than trying to handwrite them, listen to lectures/ video presentations as many times as needed, schedule online private tutoring sessions with his teachers, take breaks during lessons and give his body the movement it required, and even have morning/ early afternoon employment and complete his lessons afterwards. The built-in calendar and scheduling components of the program allowed him to do schoolwork at his own pace (seven days each week) and thereby get ahead so that he could continue playing his trombone in a band and go fishing. His medications were reduced, and he readily says that he learned more in 3 years of online school than he did the entire time he attended brick and mortar schools.

So, what worked in the online setting?

1. Certified educators taught each class.
2. All digital textbooks were available to him. Other licenses were also extended when needed such as access to digital biology laboratories for experiments and a digital graphing calculator for use in math classes. Each semester, the school provided all necessities online. Gone were the days of not having the needed materials to be successful.
3. In addition to textbooks, there were countless resources embedded in every lesson. For example, links to Khan Academy explanations, Discovery video clips, Teachlet Tutorials, and other resources such as links to encyclopedias and other types of literature are available to support the topic being learned and stretch his understanding. These added resources served as remediation and enrichment for him. As a teacher, I know for sure that it would have taken hours of my time to assemble the collection of supporting resources provided in each lesson.
4. The possibility of class offerings was tremendous. Never did he request a class that was made unavailable due to lack of enrollment or a certified teacher. The school secured a section/ teacher somewhere in the nation to make his enrollment possible.
5. Pearson/ Connections Academy has a team of tech specialists available to receive calls if any technology glitches are experienced. Honestly, most of the problems that occurred for us were user-caused! However, they were promptly and respectfully fixed – every single time.
6. The school had a complete staff – principal, guidance counselors, and teachers – who promptly responded to every email or call placed (within 24 hours, usually sooner). All members of the staff were able to assess my son's progress with the incredible educational tracking system in place. They had information regarding grades, attendance, lesson progress, etc. at their fingertips within seconds.
7. Live Lessons were held in each subject. Students could choose whether to enable video of themselves, microphone, or participation via typing responses in a conversation sidebar. Students interacted with the teachers and other students during these lessons. There was also an option of attending a recording of the Live Lessons (and submitting a small assignment proving attendance) if students had a scheduling conflict.
8. Students interacted in Discussions which were embedded in some lessons. In such activities, a topic was presented by the teachers and students took a stance on an issue, posted it, and included reasoning behind their views. Students were then required to respond to at least two classmates – either in agreement or disagreement – with further supporting details. These conversations were moderated by the teachers who offered instruction regarding online etiquette and components in a respectful exchange. (As a side note, his online school experience was 100% bully-free!)
9. Assessments were delivered in the form of lesson checks (a few questions at the end of each lesson to measure a student's understanding), quizzes, tests, portfolios, experiments, and essays. Teachers placed telephone calls to students in every subject to make a connection and evaluate progress. All learning styles were wonderfully valued and employed.
10. Any student requiring additional assistance could sign up for private online sessions with teachers. Live Tutors are always available.
11. Interaction with other students and teachers was facilitated. There was a multitude of club's students could join – even during the summer – that were sponsored and moderated by the school. The teachers

knew my son! (The 12th grade English teacher learned that my son played trombone in a rock band and played his music as students were assembling for her Live Lessons. She even volunteered to drive from Texas to watch his performance at the New Orleans Jazz Fest. The biology teacher who resided in Hawaii quickly gathered my son was an avid fisherman and geared a telephone conversation to include a comparison between fishing in the Gulf of Mexico vs. the Pacific Ocean – all while skillfully bringing tides and other lesson topics into the conversation.)

12. Another wonderful aspect of our online school was the master calendar (for every day of the school year from the first day to the last day) viewable by both students and parents/learning coaches. Gone were the days of trying to find papers in a book bag or calling others for reminders about assignments and deadlines. (This is a critical accommodation for students diagnosed with ADD/ADHD.) Daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly assignments, assessments, etc. could be viewed with the click of a finger. Seeing that a cumbersome essay was due in two weeks allowed for a break down in the tasks - doing a little each day - until the deadline (same with large tests and portfolios). Having access to this academic year calendar taught organization as opposed to being the “crutch” many school administrators/ teachers believed it to be. We cherished knowing exactly where accurate information could always be found about academic responsibilities - and it was available 24/7. This beautifully allowed him to plan for evenings when other responsibilities (such as work, extracurricular activities, family obligations, etc.) arose - perhaps submitting lessons on the weekend to clear out school obligations on a weekday.

From flashback to present, my son is now 23 years old. He is well-respected by his employer, Sherwin Williams, for his tremendous work ethic, loyalty, and dependability. He is the type of guy who shows up early to work every day, volunteers to stay late, and makes himself available to be of service when the store is in a crunch. He has the distinction of being the youngest individual promoted to the position of store manager in his district. As I always knew, he is intelligent, well-spoken, and knowledgeable about most topics that come up in discussion. His experience in the online school taught him tremendous efficiency in researching topics effectively for a dyslexic person rather than skimming textbooks. He learned how to evaluate online sources and be selective about the information being utilized. We give a tremendous amount of credit to his online high school for making a successful career a possibility for him. He is a success rather than a high school drop-out statistic.

I am deeply passionate about expanding educational opportunities for students everywhere because of our path. Is online school the best alternative for all students? Absolutely not. Is a brick-and-mortar traditional program the best alternative for all students? Absolutely not. It is the absolute obligation of every school system to serve communities with options as varied as students’ learning differences. To fail to do so condemns a portion of the population to guaranteed defeat. We all must strive for better - for ALL students.

It is for these reasons that I petition the Committee for a **FAVORABLE Report on SB0941.**

Sincerely,

Jane C. St. Pierre
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SB0941 - Virtual Schools - FAV - Kimberly Shirley

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Position: FAV

Testimony offered on behalf of:

KIMBERLY SHIRLEY

IN SUPPORT OF:

SB0941 – Primary and Secondary Education – Virtual Schools – Alterations

Senate Education, Health & Economic Affairs Committee

Hearing: 3/18/2021 at 1:00 PM

Good afternoon Mister Chairman and member of the Committee. My name is **Kimberly Shirley from Waldorf, Maryland**. I am appearing before you today to **HIGHLY SUPPORT SB0941 – Primary and Secondary Education – Virtual Schools – Alterations**.

In fall of 2018, my husband and I enrolled our daughters into Texas Connections Academy in Houston, Texas (TCAH) after my younger daughter was having trouble in a public charter school. My older daughter, who was doing well in school, decided she wanted to enroll in TCAH when she saw the flexibility and opportunities that were provided to her younger sister through the program. Our family has been in love with virtual school ever since. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, my daughters supplemented extracurricular activities with volleyball, track, saxophone lessons, and clarinet lessons. Since returning to the Maryland area, we currently do fitness videos and take walks—we sincerely hope to get back to their preferred hobbies once things normalize.

When our family joined TCAH, we entered into a partnership between myself, my children, and my children’s teachers—all working together for my children’s academic success. Through this partnership, we were quickly able to identify troubled areas for my younger daughter through increased visibility of her work assignments/testing habits, and periodic meetings with her teacher. We were ultimately able to develop a plan with her teacher to help address many of the issues she was having. We continue to utilize this plan today.

Through the TCAH, we also received quick turnarounds for graded assessments with very thoughtful and detailed feedback. This feedback was used as a conversation piece for my younger daughter and I to address areas she was struggling with. The feedback process also fortified meaningful discussions between my daughters and their teachers regarding their academic development. Through the virtual environment, access to graded assignments is immediate—we no longer had to wonder the status of graded assessments, or figure out what happened to a “missing” graded assignment.

The virtual environment and flexibility with TCAH, also allowed me to take my daughters with me when I had to travel for work—they were able to remain on schedule with their assignments and course deliverables. This environment promotes course work flexibility with continuous access to schoolwork, courses can be accessed anytime, anyplace, ensuring no missed time.

While enrolled in TCAH, my daughters were considered students of Houston Independent School Division (HISD) and were able to participate in programs offered to HISD students. This included taking state test assessments (State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR)) and an opportunity to participate in the TCAH’s Dual Enrolment Program.

My older daughter, who was already doing well in school, received an opportunity to participate in TCAH's Dual Enrollment Program through San Jacinto College. My daughter successfully completed 15 college level credits. Although challenging, she remained excited to tell relatives and friends that she was enrolled in college. Participating in TCAH's Dual Enrollment Program allowed her to truly shine and excel, making and meeting new personal goals.

In April 2020, I accepted a position in Washington, D.C and we were no longer able to participate in TCAH. **We were disappointed to find out that Maryland did not offer a similar program.** Although my daughters were able to receive a scholarship to attend Pearson's Academy—and worth every penny, the cost to attend is still quite expensive. My younger son started kindergarten this year and had to participate in a separate virtual school due to financial costs associated with Pearson Academy.

I was also disappointed to find out that Maryland did not offer the same Dual Enrollment program. I reached out to multiple higher learning institutions to include our local community college—the College of Southern Maryland (CSM); and even with her San Jacinto College transcript, CSM would not make an exception for my daughter to attend CSM under their Dual Enrollment Program.

While all students learn differently, virtual **school was a great option for both my daughters and allowed them to thrive and excel at their own pace.** It also allowed me an opportunity to be a part of their journey, and greatly improved our mother-daughter relationship. Despite the financial strain, I am very excited about the path they are on and we regularly discuss their plans for the future—which is very special to me. Virtual school may not be for everyone, but it was and is an amazing opportunity for our family. **An opportunity that should be an option at no additional cost to all Maryland students.**

I ask that you strongly consider providing the option for virtual school at no additional cost to all Maryland students and respectfully **request a FAVORABLE Report on SB0941.**

Thanking you in advance for your time and consideration,

KIMBERLY SHIRLEY

"Mother of Three Amazing Children—Whose lives changed dramatically through the option of virtual school."

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SB0941 - Virtual Schools - FAV - Michele Klein - S

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Position: FAV



Testimony offered on behalf of:
MICHELE KLEIN

IN SUPPORT OF:

SB0941 – Primary and Secondary Education – Virtual Schools – Alterations

Senate Education, Health & Economic Affairs Committee

Hearing: 3/18/2021 at 1:00 PM

“All students can learn and succeed, but not on the same day in the same way.” – William G. Spady

Good afternoon. **My name is Michele Klein.** Today, I am pleased to offer my **FULL SUPPORT** for **SB0941 – Primary and Secondary Education – Virtual Schools – Alterations.** Similar legislation was enacted by the South Carolina legislature in 2007. HB 3097 (Act 25 of 2007) authorized the State Department of Education to establish the South Carolina Virtual School Program and set some specific standards for virtual charter schools, including a requirement that 25% of instruction be 'in real-time.' That statute led to the formation of South Carolina Connections Academy (SCCA), a virtual public school, where I am currently employed as an Educator.

Since my earliest years as a child and student, I have aspired to become an educator. I was always in awe and had the utmost admiration for those teachers who profoundly changed the course of my life. Shaping the hearts and minds of young people is one of the most important and rewarding careers. For these reasons, my decision to obtain a degree in Adolescent Education was a clear choice in making my childhood dream a reality.

When I walked into my first classroom, I was grateful for the opportunity to give back to my new community in South Carolina. I was ready to ensure that all students learned at high levels. I stayed after school, supported students during my lunch and planning periods, and collaborated with my colleagues to provide meaningful project-based learning experiences. I volunteered at school functions and events that raised money for various charities. I was determined to model the love and compassion I had for my students. My involvement in various initiatives allowed me to build meaningful relationships. These relationships afforded me the opportunity to create a classroom community based on trust and mutual respect.

When I was hired at SCCA, I discovered my passion for serving students in this remote environment. Over the past six years, I have watched students thrive at Connections Academy. Learners have the flexibility to work at their own pace, attend synchronous Live Lessons, and participate in virtual events and face-to-face learning experiences that bring families together from across the state. Teachers take a personalized approach to student learning, where students and parents can call, text, or schedule a time for additional academic support. I have collaborated on committees to plan in-person events such as prom and the graduation ceremony that is held each year in June. Stakeholders work together to host online talent shows, rallies, workshops, and read aloud's that support a positive school culture. Mutually, we challenge each other to be better people, better educators, and better leaders. As a team, we empower students to use technology, work collaboratively, take risks, and to learn from their mistakes. SCCA is a family and my home.

On May 7, 2021, I will graduate with a master's degree in Administration and Supervision from Southern Wesleyan University. I am also the 2020-2021 SCCA High School Teacher of the Year and the Charter Institute at Erskine District Teacher of the Year finalist. I have presented throughout the state on how to facilitate virtual learning experiences for students. Most of these presentations were aimed at supporting traditional public schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. Educators want their students to excel, educators want students to graduate from high school, and educators want students to become productive members of society. Although traditional public schools and virtual schools are different in the way learning is structured, we share the same mission and are on the same team. It is commonly accepted that students learn differently. Learners also have a unique set of individual circumstances, backgrounds, and abilities. For these reasons, all schools have the right to coexist. This coexistence is essential to ensure all students are provided with an atmosphere where they can find happiness and academic success. I am hopeful that my own son will have these choices when he is of school age. His journey in education, like that of any other student, should be selected from a high-quality list of options that align to his needs and preferences. Life choices shape who we are, and I am confident students, and their families will choose schools that will positively influence their futures.

Enactment of SB0941 will certainly provide Maryland parents an excellent option and opportunity to provide alternative quality virtual schooling for their children. I ask that you provide a **FAVORABLE report on SB0941**.

MICHELE KLEIN

Educator

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SB0941 - Virtual Schools - FAV - Olivia Crudup - J

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Position: FAV

Testimony offered on behalf of:
OLIVIA CRUDUP

IN SUPPORT OF:
SB0941 – Primary and Secondary Education – Virtual Schools – Alterations
Senate Education, Health & Economic Affairs Committee
Hearing: 3/18/2021 at 1:00 PM

I am OLIVIA CRUDUP from Joppa, Maryland. Thank you for taking the time to read my letter. I am writing to you to show my **SUPPORT for the SB0941** regarding the Maryland Connections Academy being an attainable option for my daughter's education.

I am currently a stay-at-home mom; my husband is unfortunately laid off due to Covid-19, and we have 2 young daughters, the oldest is almost 4 and the youngest is almost 2. My husband and youngest daughter are considered high risk and my youngest has had a few health scares since the pandemic began. My friend (Karen Heathcote) referred Connections Academy to my children, knowing our circumstances. This program is thorough and inclusive to the values that I choose to raise my children with.

To send my child to in-person school is just not an option for my household for many reasons and this program would be the best source of education for my child. I have been preparing her by pre-school curriculums and they have not been the best way for her to learn. Unfortunately, we are not in the position to afford this form of education for her. If the **SB0941** is approved, my daughter will have access to virtual school with the development of her building blocks of education and development of social skills. If you ask her, a virtual teacher would be able to teach her things that she would understand differently if I was to try and introduce her to.

Please, pass the SB0941. This will be dramatically beneficial for the children who do not have the option to attend in-person school but being able to benefit similarly and not break the bank to provide the best education available to our children.

Please feel free to reach out to me with the contact information below.

Thank you for your time and efforts in **passing the SB0941!**

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SB0941- Virtual Schools - FAV - Christie Jackson -

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Position: FAV



Testimony offered on behalf of:

CHRISTIE JACKSON

Louisiana Connections Academy, Former Special Ed Director

IN SUPPORT OF:

SB0941 – Primary and Secondary Education – Virtual Schools – Alterations

Senate Education, Health & Economic Affairs Committee

Hearing: 3/18/2021 at 1:00 PM

To the Senate Committee:

My name is Christie Jackson, and I am a Senior Manager of Consulting with Pearson Online & Blended Learning (POBL) Special Populations Team headquartered in Columbia, Md. My career with Pearson began in August 2011 in Baton Rouge as a Special Education Manager at Louisiana Connections Academy (LACA), one of the first statewide, full-time, tuition-free, online schools in Louisiana. It was an exciting time, to say the least. It was sure to be a wonderful school option for so many families that struggled to find an educational structure that “fit” their child. In its first year of operation, LACA enrolled 400 students. Roughly, 75 of those students were students with special needs, including students with an Individual Education Plan, Section 504 Plan, English Language Learners, and Gifted.

As we started initial conversations with families, known as Welcome Calls, we began to hear many stories from families regarding their decision to try this new school. We would hear, “My child has an Individualized Education Program (IEP) but the school never involved me in any decision” or “My child was not being challenged enough” or “My child has an illness that prevents him from being able to function in a school building.” Repeatedly, we would hear families explain their reason for choosing LACA. What we realized is that each family had a specific reason. Each family made a conscious decision to take advantage of the new school option in Louisiana.

Each year of operation, enrollment increased as more families found out about LACA and the positive feedback spread throughout the State. LACA increased and reached its enrollment cap every year, resulting in having to place students on a waitlist. As LACA grew (there was a 2500 student enrollment limit or cap in the 5th year of operation), the needs of students in special populations began to expand. One year, LACA enrolled a student who was a wheelchair user with limited ability to use his upper extremities, along with other conditions. This student had difficulty in the school building due to being unable to transport himself throughout the school. He needed several accessibility tools to enable

him to work independently. He needed to be able to visit the restroom as often as possible without being a disturbance to others in his class.

The student also needed a flexible schedule that would enable him to attend doctor's appointments. Since enrolling in an online school, he was able to move about freely in his home environment. The accessibility tools that he needed included speech-to-text and text-to-speech software, a laptop with a touchscreen monitor, and a stylus, which we made readily available to the student. His teachers were able to schedule his lessons around his doctor's appointments without worrying about him falling behind. The student was no longer a disturbance to others in his class since he was now in his own home. Most importantly, his parents were able to become more involved in his education and were no longer concerned about his wellbeing in school.

There are countless stories to be shared about the students and families that have benefited from Connections Academy, not only in Louisiana but also at the other 44 Connections Academy schools across the nation. From the gifted young actress to the student who is bullied, to the student who is gendered nonconforming, Connections Academy has been the answer to students thriving and being successful while being their authentic selves. Students and families in Maryland should not be bound to traditional educational structures that are not best for their needs. They should have another school to choose from as the needs of students change over time. When traditional brick-and-mortar schools do not work, families should not have to pay for private schooling or be forced to homeschool without access to a qualified teacher.

The families in Maryland should have an online education option with a proven track record of success. **Passage of SB0941 will, undoubtedly, align with supporting the ever-changing needs of the students and families of Maryland. Please recommend a favorable report on SB0941.**

Sincerely,

Christie Jackson
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SB0941- Virtual Schools - FAV - Dr. Peter Sanchion

Uploaded by: RASMUSSEN, DENNIS

Position: FAV



Testimony offered on behalf of:
DR. PETER SANCHIONI
TEC Connections Academy Virtual School

IN SUPPORT OF:
SB0941 – Primary and Secondary Education – Virtual Schools – Alterations

Senate Education, Health & Economic Affairs Committee

Hearing: 3/18/2021 at 1:00 PM

Good afternoon members of the Senate Education, Health & Economic Affairs Committee. **My name is Peter Sanchioni, Ph.D.** I am the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the TEC Connections Academy (TECCA), Commonwealth Virtual School. I am offering my written testimony today in **SUPPORT** of **SB0941 – Primary and Secondary Education – Virtual Schools – Alterations** and urge your favorable consideration of this very important legislation that will establish a Statewide virtual public school for students in Maryland.

For background, in 2014 following Massachusetts legislation for virtual schools, my colleagues (public school superintendents) and I established TEC Connections Academy Commonwealth of Massachusetts Virtual School (TECCA), Massachusetts' premier virtual school. Since its inception, I have served as Chairman of the Board. Thus, I write to you with experience as a virtual school leader and a public-school superintendent.

A few years prior to 2014, Massachusetts had enacted legislation to establish virtual schools. At the onset, Massachusetts had one virtual school and that school failed to produce high-quality results. Acknowledging that as a superintendent who had students from my district attend that school, we set out to establish a second virtual school (TECCA) one that would serve the students of the Commonwealth with great success. Our rationale and belief in virtual schools was based upon:

- Not all students are equipped to attend public schools on our traditional schedule / calendar. Students who suffer from medical issues, pregnancy, athletes who need to train during the day, students who have been bullied and are afraid to come to school, students who are anti-authority, students who simply prefer online learning, all these types of learners needed an alternative setting. TECCA provides an outstanding learning opportunity for these types of students.
- As a public-school superintendent, I witnessed students leave our district (along with the funding) yet I witnessed these students move towards graduation via

TECCA. These were students who were going to end up potentially not graduating and thus negatively impact our graduation rate and/or were going to need extensive and expensive compensatory services like special education. In the end our district benefitted, and these students succeeded.

As you are probably experiencing with distance learning because of COVID, some students thrive in a virtual environment. In a true virtual school, teachers are trained to instruct both synchronously and asynchronously using well developed learning management systems. Thus, a virtual school will provide the students of Maryland, who need or desire this type of learning a school of well-trained educators in virtual learning. Strong consideration should be given to providing that option.

Through our journey as a virtual school in Massachusetts, we have learned many lessons that have helped improve the school annually. We extend an invitation to you to visit or meet with us at any time so that you may benefit from our experiences. For example, two critical areas come to mind that you may want to consider at inception:

1. For assessment purposes (state testing), find a way to allow your students to take that test in their home environment. We have found that asking a virtual student to take a high-stakes test in a new environment does not produce reliable and valid results.
2. Funding: in Massachusetts we started with a flat per pupil fee and quickly realized that the school would fall into a deficit. Legislation was amended to provide the school a per-pupil cost that increases annually based upon inflation.

In closing, I have witnessed first-hand the impact TECCA has brought to the students of Massachusetts. Every year I attend our high school graduation and have watched from a first year of 43 students graduate to grow last year when over 300 students walked the stage. It always strikes me as to how many of these students would never have been there without a virtual education provided through TECCA. I believe you will achieve similar results in Maryland and I therefore urge the Committee to adopt a **FAVORABLE Report on SB0941.**

Respectfully submitted,

Dr. Peter Sanchioni
Chairman of the Board
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SB0941- Virtual Schools - FAV - Laura Johnson - Pe

Uploaded by: RASMUSSEN, DENNIS

Position: FAV



Testimony offered on behalf of:
PEARSON ONLINE & BLENDED LEARNING

IN SUPPORT OF:
SB0941 – Primary and Secondary Education – Virtual Schools – Alterations

Senate Education, Health & Economic Affairs Committee
Hearing 3/18/2021 at 1:00 PM

Pearson Online & Blended Learning **highly supports SB0941 - Primary and Secondary Education – Virtual Schools – Alterations.**

Dear Members of the Senate Education, Health and Economic Matters Committee:

My name is Laura Johnson. I am writing you to urge your **support for SB0941**. Based on my experiences in my role at Pearson Online & Blending Learning and as a Howard County resident, I implore you to make a statewide virtual public-school option available in the State of Maryland. While I believe full-time virtual public schools are not the answer for every student, they are **an important solution for a growing number of students** in the State.

In my role at Pearson Online & Blending Learning, I have the opportunity to hear from students and families residing in other states, who share the difference their Connections Academy statewide virtual public school has made in their lives. Whether students have been bullied, have health issues, are struggling, are not being challenged enough, or need a more flexible schedule to pursue sports or the arts, they were unsuccessful in their previous brick-and-mortar school and are **now thriving in this schooling option that is currently unavailable** in the State of Maryland.

I have been a resident of Howard County for 39 years and have raised two children in our local public-school system. The traditional brick-and-mortar school model worked for them. However, it does not work for others. For example, a friend's daughter, a Howard County high-school sophomore, was struggling in her brick-and-mortar school – emotionally and academically – before the COVID-19 epidemic. When the epidemic hit and she went to full-time online learning, she really excelled, despite the somewhat limited offering. Now, the family is genuinely concerned about her having to return to in-person learning, because no virtual public-school program is available to her. Her mother, a Howard County high school counselor, recently shared that in her day-to-day work, **there are countless students for whom this schooling option would be a better fit.**

Working for an organization that makes a difference is an important value of mine. I am proud of the way our schools help each student reach his or her full potential through a high-quality, personalized education program. I know this program took years to develop and does not attempt to replicate the physical school experience by asking students to sit at a computer for 8 hours. Instead, it is a purposeful combination of individualized live lessons with teachers specifically trained in virtual education and independent work – based on the student's/family's schedule – a mix that fosters personalization and flexibility.

At a quality full-time virtual school, activity occurs in a singular online learning portal so that teachers, students, and caretakers enjoy a cohesive, streamlined experience. This balance of structured learning and flexibility allows students to not only gain the knowledge they need (and the State requires) but also pursue the topics and passions that keep them engaged both in and out of the classroom.

These schools provide:

- Continuity of learning ***every day, without interruption, at home.***
- High-quality teacher-student interaction and individualized teacher attention;
- Online courses that comply with State standards, include active learning elements, and provide instructional differentiation, including textual, visual, auditory, and hands-on;
- An environment that is free of distractions, with access to content 24/7; and
- Flexibility for scheduling, allowing students to learn when they learn best.

In Maryland, we should provide each student the absolute best educational environment in which he or she can thrive. Please join the 33 other States who have embraced this future-ready, public-school option and vote to approve this bill.

Pearson Online & Blended Learning recommends a **Favorable Committee report on SB0941.**

Thank you,

Laura S. Johnson
Director, State Account Relations
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Learn more at: www.ConnectionsAcademy.com and www.Pearson.com

SB0941 - Virtual Schools - FAV - Mickey Revenaugh

Uploaded by: Revenaugh, Mickey

Position: FAV



Testimony offered on behalf of:
PEARSON ONLINE & BLENDED LEARNING

IN SUPPORT OF:
SB0941 – Primary and Secondary Education – Virtual Schools – Alterations

Senate Education, Health & Economic Affairs Committee
Hearing 3/18/2021 at 1:00 PM

Thank you to the members of the EHEA Committee and thank you Senator Reilly for this opportunity to testify on behalf of **SB 0941**. My name is Mickey Revenaugh. I appear before you today as the **Co-Founder of Connections Academy**, a leading provider of high-quality K-12 online learning based right here in Maryland and currently serving nearly 110,000 students across the United States and around the world. Based on my experience over the past two decades in bringing personalized performance learning opportunities to students elsewhere through outstanding virtual public schools, I am profoundly honored to explore with you how to finally make this same opportunity available to children in Maryland. The time to do so is now, as families emerge from this pandemic period and more than 40% say they seek a fully online or hybrid school option for the future, according to the latest Parent Pulse poll.

When my cofounders and I gathered in Baltimore’s Inner Harbor back in 2001 in the wake of 9/11 to conceptualize what would become Connections Academy, we were responding to an emerging desire by American families for public school options that fit their children’s individual learning needs. Twenty years ago, what is now blindingly obvious was just becoming clear: That technology could allow the familiar idea of school as a one-size-fits-all place to be transformed into an anytime, anywhere, personalized experience for a new generation of students. No more would the accident of one’s ZIP code determine the quality of your child’s schooling. No more would bricks and bells limit the where and when of learning. No more would the aspiring Olympian or the budding Broadway star have to choose between their life’s passion and an excellent public school education.

What we did not know then was how essential online public school would become for thousands of especially vulnerable kids – the bullied, the struggling, the ill – all over America. In state after state, year after year, parents seeking a better fit for their child than the local brick and mortar school came together to start a Connections Academy of their own, always thrilled to learn how an online school can bring the best teachers and richest curriculum and warmest friendships right into one’s home. A carefully designed combination of real-time, live interaction and at-your-best-time asynchronous instruction made these online schools flexible, safe, and effective. Recent research, such as the independent study conducted on Connections Academy schools, shows there is no statistical difference in performance on state math and reading tests between

brick-and-mortar schools and Connections virtual schools, when matched for student mobility and other demographic factors.

And when COVID hit? Connections Academy families kept right on learning, without a hitch. In communities all over America, these virtual school veterans offered encouragement and practical strategies to their neighbors who suddenly found themselves in a kind of “emergency remote schooling.” When they saw the structure and support available at purpose-built online schools, tens of thousands of parents made the switch, swelling enrollment at the Connections Academy schools by 40% over the prior academic year. Students in this new pandemic wave are enjoying a consistent school experience with carefully designed academics, a well thought out online extracurricular program, and smart, sustainable roles for parents as Learning Coaches.

But not in Maryland!

In Maryland, families in some districts can choose to have their kids in a school building every other day, with a teacher behind a laptop frantically trying to instruct students simultaneously online and in person, friends on the other side of plexiglass and lunch alone at one’s desk. In other districts, it is six hours of Zoom a day. Thousands of families have left the Maryland public system altogether for private school, either clicks or bricks. But nowhere is there the option of choosing a purpose-built online public school for students in Maryland.

You now have the opportunity to change that. SB 0941 provides a common-sense and thoughtful way for Maryland to join the two-thirds of American states that offer an online public school option. It provides a vehicle for parents and educators across the state to come together with a higher ed institution, a school district, or the state itself to launch an online public school, and to manage its growth for best quality and outcomes. The bill reflects the latest thinking about what makes a great online public school experience, creating a launchpad for Maryland to leapfrog into the forefront of K-12 virtual learning. And it answers the persistent call from families – all the louder now that they are had a taste over the past year – for an online option that lets their children learn how they learn best deep into the 21st century.

Please answer that call. **Please move SB 0941 forward** for kids and families across Maryland. On behalf of myself and Pearson Online & Blended Learning, we **urge a Favorable Committee report on SB0941.**

Respectfully submitted,

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Learn more at: www.ConnectionsAcademy.com and www.Pearson.com

SB 941 - Virtual School - Alterations - UNF - Dove

Uploaded by: Dove, Tina

Position: UNF

Testimony in Opposition to Senate Bill 941
Primary and Secondary Education—Virtual School—Alterations

Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

March 18, 2021

1:00 pm

Tina N. Dove, M.Ed.
Government Relations

The Maryland State Education Association opposes Senate Bill 941, legislation authorizing the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), a county board of education, or a public institution of higher education to establish a statewide virtual school; repeal the provision in state law requiring MSDE to approve the establishment of a virtual school; and allow virtual schools to be exempt from certain state laws and regulations.

MSEA represents 75,000 educators and school employees who work in Maryland's public schools, teaching and preparing our 896,837 students for careers and jobs of the future. MSEA also represents 39 local affiliates in every county across the state of Maryland, and our parent affiliate is the 3 million-member National Education Association (NEA).

MSEA opposes this legislation because we believe that virtual schools do not best serve our students learning need nor our state's goal to provide a world-class education to all Maryland students. Proponents of virtual learning programs contend that this option provides students with expanded learning opportunities and that online schools are capable of tailoring their instruction to the individual learning styles and needs of their students. They also argue that states that provide online learning options benefit from the cost savings gained by not having to spend taxpayer dollars on the resources associated with traditional brick-and-mortar schools, such as personnel, transportation, and facilities.

But what they often don't point out is that virtual schools—including virtual charter schools—do exact costs, and these costs are paid by students by way of poor academic outcomes. According to a 2017 study by the National Education Policy Center (NEPC), virtual schools underperform academically when

compared to other schools, continuing a trend they have seen since they first issued a report on virtual learning back in 2013.¹ Specifically,

- 37.4 percent of full-time virtual schools received acceptable performance ratings; and
- virtual schools have an on-time graduation rate of 43.4 percent (compared to the national average of 82.3 percent).

This study affirms what Stanford's conservative-leaning Center for Research On Education Outcomes (CREDO) found in their 2015². Their research showed that,

Across all tested students in online charters, the typical academic gains for math are -0.25 standard deviations (equivalent to 180 fewer days of learning) and -0.10 (equivalent to 72 fewer days) for reading.... This means that compared to their twin attending [traditional public school], ...attending an online charter school leads to lessened academic growth for the average student.

State officials in Indiana examined their virtual charter schools due to their issues with poor performance. Time and again, they found developments so troubling³ that they have since cut back on their public funding of virtual charter schools.⁴ This is noteworthy considering the support these schools have enjoyed in the state and the pace at which they have proliferated. It should be noted that the poor performance of these virtual charter schools also attracted the attention of Congress.⁵

NEPC's report authors issued the following recommendation:

Policymakers [should] slow or stop the growth in the number of virtual schools and the size of their enrollments until the reasons for their relatively poor performance have been identified and addressed. They should prioritize understanding why virtual schools perform poorly under a

¹ https://nepc.colorado.edu/sites/default/files/publications/RB%20Virtual%20Schools%202017_0.pdf (Accessed on February 7, 2021)

² https://credo.stanford.edu/sites/g/files/sbiybj6481/f/online_charter_study_final.pdf (Accessed on February 7, 2021)

³ <https://chalkbeat.org/posts/in/2019/04/10/indiana-paid-for-thousands-of-students-who-never-earned-credits-at-virtual-charter-schools/> (Accessed on February 7, 2021)

⁴ <https://chalkbeat.org/posts/in/2019/04/24/a-shot-across-the-bow-indiana-cuts-back-on-public-funding-for-virtual-charter-schools/> (Accessed on February 7, 2021)

⁵ <https://www.chalkbeat.org/posts/in/2018/06/13/indiana-online-charter-schools-face-scrutiny-at-congressional-committee-hearing/> (Accessed on February 7, 2021)



college- and career-ready accountability system and how their performance can be improved prior to expansion.⁶

Given our state and our country's current experience with nearly a year of virtual learning under the emergency precautions necessitated by the COVID-19 global pandemic, there can be no further doubt that virtual learning, by and large, has been an abysmal failure for the vast majority of our students, particularly those who are the most vulnerable or who are the most in need of academic and non-academic supports. Based on the outcry of parents throughout our state and across the nation, it appears as though we are not alone in our serious concerns about the normalizing and institutionalizing of virtual learning for our students.

For these reasons, **we strongly urge an unfavorable report on Senate Bill 941.**

⁶ https://nepc.colorado.edu/sites/default/files/publications/RB%20Virtual%20Schools%202017_0.pdf (Accessed on February 7, 2021)

SB 941 virtual schools PSSAM OPP.doc.pdf

Uploaded by: Fannon, Mary Pat

Position: UNF



Mary Pat Fannon, Executive Director
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Bill: SB 941 – Primary and Secondary Education – Virtual Schools – Alterations
Date: February 12, 2021
Position: Oppose
Committee: Senate Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee
Contact: Mary Pat Fannon, Executive Director

This bill authorizes the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), a local board of education, or a public institution of higher education to establish a statewide virtual public school without approval from the State Superintendent of Schools. A statewide virtual public school is exempt from specified State policies and regulations. A statewide virtual public school may not (1) enroll more than 1% of school-aged children in each county and (2) charge any fees or tuition to enroll in or attend the virtual school. The bill establishes a funding formula to distribute federal and State funds to a statewide virtual public school. An institution of higher education may contract with other entities to perform the duties of the virtual school and retain up to 2% of distributed funds to administer the program.

The Public Schools Superintendents’ Association of Maryland (PSSAM), **opposes SB 941.**

PSSAM continues to support local and state efforts to implement virtual learning initiatives, but we oppose any legislative mandates in the creation of these programs. While current regulations may be need to be adjusted as we reflect on our year-long distance learning, these changes should be contemplated by education experts including MSDE, superintendents, and teachers. We need to retain the ability to create these programs to meet and respond to our local priorities, which also includes working with students and communities.

In order to preserve the highest quality public education in Maryland, we need to enter the world of virtual learning with a deliberate, methodical, and research-based approach. We need to create virtual school programs that ensure academic success for our students and instills confidence for families knowing that their children will continue to receive the highest quality instruction. As already mentioned, we need to work collaboratively with the Department and teachers, giving them a meaningful role in the development of virtual schools. A more formally developed virtual learning model is imminent, but it now is not the time to rush into its implementation.

For these reasons, PSSAM requests an **unfavorable** report on Senate Bill 941.

AACPS SB941 Virtual Schools OPP 3.18.21.pdf

Uploaded by: Ortiz, Jeanette

Position: UNF



SB941 PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION - VIRTUAL SCHOOLS - ALTERATIONS

March 18, 2021

EDUCATION, HEALTH, AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

OPPOSE

Jeanette Ortiz, Esq., Legislative & Policy Counsel (410.703.5352)

Anne Arundel County Public Schools (AACPS) opposes **SB941 Primary and Secondary Education - Virtual Schools - Alterations**. This bill authorizes the Maryland State Department of Education, a county board of education, or a public institution of higher education to establish a statewide public virtual school in the State. It repeals certain provisions of law regarding the establishment and operation of virtual schools and authorizes eligible students to enroll in any State virtual school. The bill also limits the enrollment of a virtual school and prohibits fees or tuition being charged. It requires the State to distribute federal and State funds to virtual schools.

AACPS appreciates the bill's intent to expand virtual learning opportunities for Maryland students. However, we oppose doing so by imposing a statewide mandate that each local board establish a virtual school. This bill would require each school system to establish a virtual school platform for students in every grade and to do so in the 2021-2022 school year.

Local school systems are already fully authorized to provide appropriate virtual learning opportunities under existing law. In fact, AACPS is currently looking to enter into a virtual school option for current home instruction students as a program of choice in the upcoming school year for targeted middle and high school students who have been successfully enrolled in Home Instruction. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in statewide school facility closures which compelled the immediate transition to distance learning through access to online platforms and other instructional materials from mid-March of 2020 through the current school year. This is also happening without a need for a statewide mandate as such a mandate would result in an unfunded mandate and infringe upon local governance. While virtual options and online learning offerings are planned and will maximize engagement, this does not require a virtual school.

AACPS also has concerns regarding the provision in the bill that would exempt a statewide virtual public school specified State policies and regulations related to the length of time required for learning opportunities per academic year, attendance, curriculum, class size, instruction, staffing ratios, professional development, and textbooks.

Accordingly, AACPS respectfully requests an **UNFAVORABLE** committee report on SB941.

MEC Testimony-SB941-Virtual School Alterations.pdf

Uploaded by: Tyler, Jr.-Chair, Rick

Position: UNF



Maryland Education Coalition



INSPIRES ACTION & POSITIVE CHANGE SO MARYLAND'S STUDENTS SUCCEED

Rick Tyler, Jr., Chair

Web site - www.marylandeducationcoalition.org

Email - md.education.coaliton@gmail.com

DATE: March 18, 2021

BILL: SB0941

COMMITTEE: Education, Health, and
Environmental Affairs

TITLE: Primary and Secondary Education – Virtual
Schools – Alterations

POSITION – STRONGLY OPPOSE

The Maryland Education Coalition (MEC) has been in existence for over 40 years and is made up of 20 statewide organizations & several individuals who represent parents, civil rights, & special population groups including lower income, special needs, limited English, Gifted & Talented and people of color. We advocate for adequate, equitable funding and systematic accountability for the estimated 900,000 public school students in Maryland’s public schools regardless of their academic, cultural, economic, geographic, racial, or other demographic status.

MEC strongly opposes SB 941- Primary and Secondary Education – Virtual Schools – Alterations. If approved, this bill would exempt virtual schools defined in this bill from several important provisions of law required of public schools in the State of Maryland including some required by Charter Schools. Approving virtual schools as defined in this bill would also create a school program using public dollars that more closely resembles nonpublic and homeschool programs without clear non-discrimination policies, transparency, comparable student performance data, and detail accountability reports in the use of all public dollars.

MEC and many of its partners and friends supports adequate, equitable investment of public money for public and approved private special needs schools only - essential for teaching the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for our children to be contributing members in our communities, without discrimination. MEC opposes the use of any public operating or capital funds for vouchers, tax credits, or tax subsidies for all other non-public, private, parochial, or home schools.

In summary, MEC wants to be clear that we do not oppose nonpublic or home schools and respects such choices by parents or guardians. However, most of these schools fail or refuse to provide transparent, clear data of admission, enrollment, discrimination, academic performance, or financial status. In addition, the recently passed American Rescue Plan allocated over \$49 million dollars specifically for nonpublic schools and although we also oppose this action also, nonpublic schools may be able to use these additional funds for such programs.

In closing, Maryland Public Schools already have the ability and now some experience with virtual education under current policies and if anything, existing polices may need strengthening and not weakening.

Therefore, we request an unfavorable report for SB941- Primary and Secondary Education – Virtual Schools – Alterations.

Respectfully yours,
Rick Tyler, Jr., Chair

Advocates for Children and Youth, American Civil Liberties Union of MD, Arts Education in Maryland Schools, Arts Every Day, Attendance Works, CASA, Decoding Dyslexia of MD, Disability Rights MD, League of Women Voters of MD, Let Them See Clearly, MSC-NAACP, Maryland PTA, Maryland Coalition for Community Schools, Maryland Coalition for Gifted & Talented Ed, Maryland Out of School Time Network, Public Justice Center, Maryland School Psychologists' Association, Parent Advocacy Consortium, Right to Read MD, School Social Workers of MD, Barbara Dezmon, Kalam Hettleman, David Hornbeck, Rick Tyler, Jr., Shamoyia Gardiner, Sharon Rubinstein

