

# Testimony Package:

‘A’

## **Coalition Leadership**

MARYLAND STUDENT COALITION

2021

Maryland Student Coalition

**PACKAGE 'A'**

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<i>2</i>	Hunter Craig	Coalition Assistant Director (Recent Graduate - Howard County);  <i>Member, Howard County MLK Jr. Holiday Commission.</i>
<i>3</i>	Christopher Lidard	Coalition Outreach Coordinator (Student - Howard County);  <i>President, Howard County Association of Student Councils ("HCASC").</i>
<i>4</i>	Lauren Raskin	Coalition Outreach Coordinator (Student - Montgomery County);  <i>Advocacy Coordinator, Maryland Association of Student Councils; Member, Maryland Youth Advisory Council.</i>

February 12, 2021

**TO:** Members of the Ways and Means Committee; Maryland House of Delegates

**FROM:** Jonathon DiPietro, Director - Maryland Student Coalition  
(410)960-0726 , [jonathon.dipietro1@gmail.com](mailto:jonathon.dipietro1@gmail.com)  
6000 Leaves of Grass Court, Clarksville, MD 21029

**RE:** House Bill 753: Education - Student-Organized Peaceful Demonstrations -  
Student Discipline and Policy

**POSITION:** **In Favor**

Chair Kaiser, Vice Chair Washington, and Members of the Committee, as the original lead organizer of this initiative, Director of the Maryland Student Coalition, a current Howard County high school student, Chair of the Legislative Affairs Committee of the Howard County Association of Student Councils, and the Student Member of the Howard County Human Rights Commission<sup>1</sup>, I am writing in support of House Bill 753.

“First Amendment rights, applied in light of the special characteristics of the school environment, are available to teachers and students. It can hardly be argued that either students or teachers shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate.”

In *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District*, 393 U.S. 503 (1969), the Court solidified the judicial protection for students right’s to exercise their rights to peacefully demonstrate in school, through the means of a political expression in opposition to the ongoing Vietnam War. Federal and State courts have continuously upheld this ruling to protect the First Amendment rights of students, with only exceptions made with the intent to protect the safety of the students and learning environment. This coalition strongly believes that this interpretation extends to the rights of students to organize a demonstration on school grounds- public property that they are mandated to attend. House Bill 753, seeks to legislatate these protections and solidify Maryland’s commitment towards protecting the democratic rights of all its citizens. This

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<sup>1</sup> I am representing my personal views, and do not represent the whole Human Rights Commission

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legislation serves the important purpose of ensuring equal implementation of the Constitution, and forms mutually agreed upon procedures for students to organize and participate in demonstrations.

In the past, I have had the ability to participate in demonstrations at my school, and have witnessed first hand the large amount of inconsistencies when it comes to the allowance for students to organize, and in many instances, the outright attempt to prohibit participation in demonstrations on campus. Students continue to act with passion, responsibility, and the maturity to engage their democratic institutions through the test of speaking out.

This coalition consists of student leaders, activists, organizers, and many student members of boards of education. Together we have worked closely with several school systems, teachers, administrators, parents, and legal counsel to ensure this initiative works for everyone and effectively protects students' rights to demonstrate.

As expressed previously, House Bill 753 legislates essential constitutional protections for the generations of our future. It ensures equal treatment of students for exercising their democratic responsibility, and seeks to build political efficacy to shape the future of our democracy.

For the reasons stated above, I urge the committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 753.

February 12, 2021

**TO:** Members of the Ways and Means Committee; Maryland House of Delegates

**FROM:** Hunter Craig; huntercraig71108@gmail.com; 410-979-6862  
7357 Broken Staff Columbia, MD 21045

**RE:** House Bill 753: Education - Student-Organized Peaceful Demonstrations -  
Student Discipline and Policy

**POSITION: In Favor**

Chair Kaiser, Vice Chair Washington and esteemed Members of the Committee, I am writing as the Assistant Director of the Maryland Student Coalition, a Commissioner on the Howard County MLK Jr. Holiday Commission, and a recent graduate from HCPSS, in favor of House Bill 753.

“It can hardly be argued that either students or teachers shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate.” This argument made by Supreme Court Justice Abe Fortas during the Tinker v. Des Moines trial illuminates the legal right that students have to demonstrate on school grounds. The 1969 ruling made clear that students' constitutional rights shall not be muted upon stepping foot into a public institution that they're legally required to attend. House Bill 753 will serve to protect such universal rights for students without the fear of additional consequences. This bill will also elevate student voice and recognize the importance of peaceful demonstration. Furthermore, this bill will offer an unintentional but wholly desired educational experience; civic engagement.

I have personally participated in a walk out demonstration as a student in the Howard County Public School System. In March of 2018, students at my school and around the country led an organized and peaceful movement as a response to the mass shooting that took place one month prior at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. Our demonstration turned out to be a huge success. Students conducted themselves in a respectful manner and staff encouraged my fellow peers and I to stand up for what we believe in. Hundreds of students walked out, gathered on the football field bleachers and listened to powerful speeches given by

our classmates. I will never forget this experience and the role we all played in making our voices heard. Time and time again we hear politicians say that students are our future. Well, it's time to give the future a voice free from barriers.

For the reasons stated above, I urge the committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 753.

February 12, 2021

**TO:** Members of the Ways and Means Committee; Maryland House of Delegates

**FROM:** Christopher Lidard,  
*President, Howard County Association of Student Councils*

**RE:** House Bill 753: Education - Student-Organized Peaceful Demonstrations  
Student Discipline and Policy

**POSITION:** **In Favor**

Chair Kaiser, Vice Chair Washington, and Members of the Committee, as one of the student organizers for this initiative, a Howard County student, and the President of the Howard County Association of Student Councils, I am writing in support of House Bill 753.

As the External Outreach Coordinator for the coalition of Maryland students who have worked so diligently to create and advocate for this bill, I have seen firsthand the amazing work of a group of organized, engaged, and thoughtful students. Our coalition represents just over 60 students from 16 school systems, ranging from the mountains of Garrett County to the shores of Wicomico. A key aspect of our composition is that we have no adult members or advisors-- our actions and advocacy work are completely facilitated by students, for students.

Among the coalition members are Student Members on the local board of education, student government leaders, and other student activists. Many, but not all, are also members of statewide advocacy groups such as the Maryland Association of Student Councils, the Maryland Youth Advisory Council, and the Maryland SMOB Coalition. Those experiences alone are a testament to how deeply our students care about the future of education in our state and are willing to dedicate their time and energy into crafting the solutions that will support that vision.

However, the most impressive feature of our coalition is its diversity. Our coalition represents students who come from a wide variety of cultural, socioeconomic and geographic backgrounds. We include students who have widely differing political ideologies and educational philosophies. Despite all of this, each member of this coalition shares the common goal of protecting students' fundamental right to free speech and assembly.

That is because this bill does not represent a partisan agenda or an isolated cause. It represents the ability for students to demonstrate and stand up for their beliefs, whatever they may be. It represents the ability for students to act on and share their lived experiences. And it represents the ability for students to feel confident that the institutions they are a part of value their voices and their perspectives in the things that affect them most.

We have assembled a coalition of students that looks like Maryland. Dozens of our voices have cried out for change from each corner of the state. We now look to our legislators to make that change a reality for all Maryland students.

For these reasons, I urge the committee to issue a favorable report on HB0753.

February 12, 2021

**TO:** Members of the Ways and Means Committee; Maryland House of Delegates  
**FROM:** Lauren Raskin, laurenraskin5@gmail.com, 301-366-9479  
22321 Flintridge Drive, Brookeville, MD, 20833  
**RE:** House Bill 753  
**POSITION:** **In Favor**

Chair Kaiser, Vice Chair Washington, and Members of the Committee, I am writing as a student from Montgomery County, in favor of House Bill 753, which seeks to protect the right for students to peacefully demonstrate on public school grounds and legalize all forms of peaceful and student led protest on Maryland Public School property.

In the simplest of terms: uninhibited student voice, the principle to which this bill seeks to achieve, is unequivocally a necessity- and yet, as it stands, it is currently a necessity that is by no means being protected or fulfilled by our school systems. It is in these same school systems in which we are taught from a young age the importance of civic engagement, the sheer significance and power of peaceful activism as a means of facilitating change in our communities and society. The lack of protection for student voice and youth empowerment, therefore, is a source of vile hypocrisy; how can we justifiably mandate civic education in our academic institutions, and yet in the same breath punish students for exercising what they have learned? The foundation to which this bill stands upon actively promotes the importance of the preservation and encouragement of student voice, and should be passed, will symbolise the support of law makers in this same capacity. Members of the Committee, we need you on our side. We must no longer remain complacent in lack of provisions that allow school systems to diminish our Constitutional right to activism; mere acknowledgment of the problem is no longer acceptable. In a time in which more and more students begin to tackle issues pertaining to racial injustice, climate change, gun regulations, and more, we as a State must actively support their ability to take a stand in what they believe in a regulated and responsible manner. And we must start now, with the passing and ratification of House Bill 753.

As someone who has participated (and served as a leader) in a multitude of advocacy related pursuits, I can attest to the impact they have on one's maturity and development. Whether it be organized walk outs for gun reform, sit-ins for achievement of educational equity in our schools, or marches for the Black Lives Matter movement, I have learned more about public speaking, interacting with elected officials, and the intricacies of our governing systems more so than I ever have in an academic setting. The ability to engage in political participation, is thereby, not only a right, but an entity which will prove to be beneficial for our current student body, and the future generations to come.

For the reasons stated above, I urge the committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 753.