

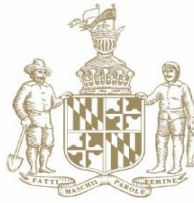
WILLIAM WIVELL
Legislative District 2A
Washington County

Environment and Transportation
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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Annapolis Office
The Maryland House of Delegates
6 Bladen Street, Room 322
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
410-841-3447 · 301-858-3447
800-492-7122 Ext. 3447
Fax 410-841-3818 · 301-858-3818
William.Wivell@house.state.md.us

District Office
P.O. Box 273
51 South Main Street
Smithsburg, Maryland 21783
301-824-3369

HB1104, Primary & Secondary Education – Virtual School – Feasibility Study.

I am pleased to present HB1104 for your consideration.

The on-going pandemic has caused many of us to take a second look at the way we do business, including the operation of our public education system.

There are numerous opinions on the success or failure of virtual instruction, and I can agree that our children are likely best served by in-person learning. There are, however, many situations that can give rise to the need for virtual instruction, not just during the current pandemic. I recall having conversations regarding development of a virtual high school with our Washington County Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Elizabeth Morgan, many years ago -- when I served on the Board of County Commissioners. Situations necessitating the need for remote instruction are many and include geographic, illness, injury, bullying, or other mental, physical, or emotional needs of our youth.

If on-line instruction is here to stay (and I truly believe that it is), let's ensure that are students are provided with a world-class virtual experience. I have heard from many parents that the quality of the current instruction varies widely – across faculty – across schools – across school systems – and across the State. I am not faulting any of these institutions, as they were caught off-guard with the spread of the virus.

The need for a State-wide, standardized, top-notch virtual school is evident. This bill directs the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) to conduct a feasibility study for development, establishment, and operation of a State-wide virtual school for primary and secondary education. In addition to the obvious benefits of a state-wide approach, there should also be cost savings due to economies of scale in developing one state-wide virtual model rather than multiple jurisdictions duplicating their efforts.

I thank you for your attentiveness and ask for a favorable report. Thank you.