



March 1, 2021 - Written Testimony for HB1170

Thank you, Chairpersons and Committee Members, for allowing me the opportunity to testify informationally on HB1170. My name is McKenzie Allen and I am the executive director of the Maryland Alliance of Public Charter Schools (also known as MAPCS). MAPCS is a nonprofit organization comprised of charter school operators from across the state. We represent over 21,000 students in 46 schools over six districts.

Our public charter schools, like all public schools, were deeply impacted by the pandemic. Between the abrupt closure of schools, unclear reopening dates, and students and families left in the dark – we saw our already inequitable education systems become even more inaccessible across the state. We, however, saw our public charter school pivot more quickly and effectively than our traditional school counterparts in response to the circumstances. Our public charter schools reported higher rates of students contact, retention, and success in a virtual setting.

While HB1170 does state that “Authorizing the 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; repealing certain provisions of law regarding the establishment and operation of virtual schools; authorizing eligible students to enroll in any State virtual school; prohibiting a virtual school from enrolling a certain number of certain students and from charging fees or tuition; requiring the State to distribute certain funds to virtual schools; etc.” It does not explicitly name the possibility for a charter school or contract school to provide these opportunities. As we know, the charter school law does not permit virtual charter schools, but if a District, State, University, or County Board of Education can establish a public school to provide virtual instruction, a charter school should be given the same opportunity as a traditional to be that option. If this law moves forward, it should include acknowledgement of a charter being given the authorization opportunity within the law’s parameters and, in turn, change the current charter law prohibiting it.

Based on preliminary data collected by our organization, we saw an average of 92% of public charter school students attending school every day in Baltimore City alone during the fall semester. Given the significant decrease in overall district enrollment, we believe public charter schools are a beacon for innovation in the virtual learning space and should be considered in HB1170. Also, they would be eligible for additional funding under Maryland’s CSP grant upon startup and approval.

If you have any questions or comments, please do not hesitate to reach out. I can be reached at the information below.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'McKenzie Allen', written in a cursive style.

McKenzie Allen
Executive Director, Maryland Alliance of Public Charter Schools
mckenzie@mdcharters.org
410.919.9678 EXT 1
www.marylandcharters.org