



Testimony Submitted on Behalf of the Garrett County Education Association

House Bill 1128 - Garrett County – Public Schools – Virtual Education Days

House Ways & Means Committee

On

February 17, 2021

Delegates:

The Garrett County Education Association (GCEA) views House Bill 1198 unfavorably. Though GCEA leadership understands the intent of this bill, it is problematic on multiple levels. It would not be advantageous for educators or students.

Garrett County Education Association is a member driven organization of education employees from a wide variety of career classifications. We are the teachers, instructional assistants, secretaries, building service workers, cafeteria workers and maintenance staff that make Garrett County Public Schools function for our students and communities on a day to day basis. GCEA is an affiliate of the Maryland State Education Association and the National Education Association.

GCEA urges an unfavorable report on HB 1128. First, as the pandemic has demonstrated, there is no substitute for the in-person expertise of our members. To the greatest extent possible, students must have the benefit of that expertise and the replacement of it with virtual instruction must be reserved for the most serious of circumstances. Periodic inclement weather does not meet that standard.

Next, the elimination of “snow days” during this pandemic has been a blow to staff and student morale. It has become clearer now than ever that the brief respite from school can be a gift. As important as learning in a school setting is for students, so is the chance to build a snowman, have a cup of hot chocolate, warm up by a fire or just snuggle under a blanket with the dog (or cat) without having to think about school. As a West Virginia Superintendent put it sometimes we should, “Let snow days be snow days.”

Finally, there is a danger in delegating this much authority to any Superintendent. It makes hazier the legal requirement that that person would have to consult with the exclusive bargaining agent over possible effects on working conditions. The bill does not require consultation with the locally elected Board of Education to impose a potentially prolonged closure of schools. It also does not require any input from the public relative to such a decision.

GCEA appreciates your consideration of this testimony and urges you to report this bill as unfavorable.