



Testimony offered on behalf of:
MICHELE KLEIN

IN SUPPORT OF:
HB 1170 – Primary and Secondary Education – Virtual Schools – Alterations

House Ways and Means Committee
Hearing: 3/3/2021 at 1:30 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 **HB 1170 – 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 LiveLessons, 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.

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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 HB1170 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 HB1170**.

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