

February 12, 2021

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

FROM: Jake Burdett, jakeburdett11@gmail.com, 443-833-5051
5824 Timberview Drive Elkridge, MD 21075

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, I am writing as a 22 year old recent college graduate and the President of the Columbia Democratic Club from Howard County, as well as a member of the Howard County Young Democrats, in favor of House Bill 753. The issue of students peacefully demonstrating is very important to me because although I did not become politically active as young as the Howard County high school students who originally came up with the idea to draft this bill, I did get involved with student activism when I was a college student at the publicly-funded Salisbury University.

In 2018, when I was 20 years old, I attended a very high-profile marijuana legalization protest against Congressman Andy Harris at his Salisbury Congressional office, and he ended up pressing 2 felony charges against me for live-streaming the protest without his staffers' permission

(https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/legal-issues/md-marijuana-activist-charged-with-wiretapping-for-recording-meeting-with-congressional-staffer/2019/02/14/f420ef8c-308a-11e9-8ad3-9a5b113ecd3c_story.html?outputType=amp). Even though I was not actually convicted of any crimes, and the protest was not on school grounds and had nothing to do with Salisbury University, my University still decided to call a Student Code of Conduct hearing to investigate if my actions at the protest had violated the Student Code of Conduct, and if I therefore needed to be formally reprimanded, or even expelled from the University, for my actions. Luckily the University ended up not taking any formal disciplinary action against me, but I still felt that having the hearing at all was extremely inappropriate, and that even the possibility of punishing students for peacefully demonstrating served to intimidate myself and other students who may have been considering participating in future peaceful demonstrations.

One of the main goals of the public school system are to prepare young people on how to be engaged and active citizens capable of taking actions that can create positive change in their community. In this way, allowing students to participate in peaceful demonstrations for issues they care about encourages civic participation among young people, which actually complements our public school system and learning curriculum, rather than disrupts it, which

some of this bill's detractors may try to claim. No student should ever have to fear punishment simply for daring to exercise their first amendment right to freedom of expression.

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