



Testimony Submitted on Behalf of the Garrett County Education Association

On

Garrett County – Public Schools – Virtual Education Days Pilot Program

Senate Bill 676

March 31, 2021

The Garrett County Education Association (GCEA) views Senate Bill 676 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. While the amendments make this bill a pilot program, GCEA still opposes the bill for the reasons outlined below.

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 SB 676. 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.

Further, 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 just requires notification after the decision was made. It also does not require any input from the public relative to such a decision.

Finally, GCEA is concerned about the potential impacts of this kind of policy to Education Support Professionals. This kind of policy could have financial ramifications for members of the school community, such as food and nutrition staff, bus drivers, clerical staff. If a school is closed for a virtual education day, these professionals could lose compensation for that day. These are often the lowest paid employees in the building are less likely to make up for a lost day's pay.

GCEA appreciates your consideration of this testimony and urges an unfavorable report on Senate Bill 676.