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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
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Testimony in Support of HB1376 - Primary and Secondary Education - Virtual Education - Requirements

HB1376 is a comprehensive bill that aims to remedy the learning loss suffered by our students over the last year, as well as equip our state for high-quality virtual education when circumstances require its implementation.

It is clear that our state and local education systems were ill-prepared for the sudden transition to remote learning last March, and, despite having a year to make changes, our students continue to suffer from inadequate educational opportunities. HB1376 provides robust infrastructure to ensure our school systems are prepared and adequately equipped when students are required to learn remotely. This ongoing preparation is key to ensuring that students don't lose valuable learning time.

Specifically, this comprehensive virtual learning legislation would:

Equip Teachers

- Establish a set of best practices and standards that teachers would have to adhere to during periods of virtual instruction;
- Require teachers to undergo frequent training and professional development on these best practices and standards; and
- Provide teachers with the tools necessary to record asynchronous lectures so that class time can be used for engaging students in collaborative peer-to-peer work.

Expand Virtual Learning Infrastructure

- Create a universal learning management system for all Maryland schools to use and ensure it implements the Kirwan curriculum standards;
- Allow county Boards of Education to elect for schools to transition to virtual learning in the case of a sustained event that prevents normal in-person attendance over a period of multiple days;
- Expand computer security infrastructure for virtual education; and
- Encourage the establishment of in-person learning centers when possible to provide students with a physical learning location during a period of virtual learning.

Comprehensively Engage Students and Their Families

- Require that county boards have an equity plan for schools that transition to virtual learning, including methods to accurately measure attendance, continue physical education, accommodate the needs of students with disabilities, and provide additional

tutoring and learning time to at-risk students including ELLs, low-income students, and students with disabilities;

- Require that school staff check in with students individually at least once a week, and multiple times a week for struggling students; and
- Require that schools develop culturally appropriate parent engagement plans and provide as much information as possible about scheduling and available services to parents in their native language.

The passage of HB1376 is specifically important to further the State's goals regarding educational equity. Black and Brown/low-income families are disproportionately being impacted by the pandemic. Data has shown that these communities are at a higher risk of infection, death, income/job loss, food/housing insecurity, and have a lack of access to technology/internet. All of these factors contribute to learning loss. Barriers to educational equity for Black and Brown/low-income students and students with disabilities have been exacerbated by the pandemic and virtual learning. It is our responsibility as a legislature to address these disparities and gaps in opportunity.

This sweeping legislation would prepare our educators and our schools to minimize the real and devastating effects of learning loss. In a time where we can see a distinct and unprecedented widening of the achievement gap as our most vulnerable students—students of color, low-income students, and students with disabilities—succumb to the difficulties of remote learning, it is our imperative to do everything we can to ensure that this never happens again.

For those reasons, I strongly urge a favorable report on HB1376.