



Testimony offered on behalf of:
PEARSON ONLINE & BLENDED LEARNING

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

Pearson Online & Blended Learning **highly supports HB 1170** - Primary and Secondary Education – Virtual Schools – Alterations.

Dear Members of the Ways and Means Committee:

My name is Laura Johnson. I am writing you to urge your **support for HB 1170**. Based on my experiences in my role at Pearson Online & Blending Learning and as a Howard County resident, I implore you to make a statewide virtual public-school option available in the State of Maryland. While I believe full-time virtual public schools are not the answer for every student, they are **an important solution for a growing number of students** in the State.

In my role at Pearson Online & Blending Learning, I have the opportunity to hear from students and families residing in other states, who share the difference their Connections Academy statewide virtual public school has made in their lives. Whether students have been bullied, have health issues, are struggling, are not being challenged enough, or need a more flexible schedule to pursue sports or the arts, they were unsuccessful in their previous brick-and-mortar school and are **now thriving in this schooling option that is currently unavailable** in the State of Maryland.

I have been a resident of Howard County for 39 years and have raised two children in our local public-school system. The traditional brick-and-mortar school model worked for them. However, it does not work for others. For example, a friend's daughter, a Howard County high-school sophomore, was struggling in her brick-and-mortar school – emotionally and academically – before the COVID-19 epidemic. When the epidemic hit and she went to full-time online learning, she really excelled, despite the somewhat limited offering. Now, the family is genuinely concerned about her having to return to in-person learning, because no virtual public-school program is available to her. Her mother, a Howard County high school counselor, recently shared that in her day-to-day work, **there are countless students for whom this schooling option would be a better fit**.

Working for an organization that makes a difference is an important value of mine. I am proud of the way our schools help each student reach his or her full potential through a high-quality, personalized education program. I know this program took years to develop and does not attempt to replicate the physical school experience by asking students to sit at a computer for 8 hours. Instead, it is a purposeful combination of individualized live lessons with teachers specifically trained in virtual education and independent work – based on the student's/family's schedule – a mix that fosters personalization and flexibility.

At a quality full-time virtual school, activity occurs in a singular online learning portal so that teachers, students, and caretakers enjoy a cohesive, streamlined experience. This balance of structured learning and flexibility allows students to not only gain the knowledge they need (and the State requires) but also pursue the topics and passions that keep them engaged both in and out of the classroom.

These schools provide:

- Continuity of learning ***every day, without interruption, at home.***
- High-quality teacher-student interaction and individualized teacher attention;
- Online courses that comply with State standards, include active learning elements, and provide instructional differentiation, including textual, visual, auditory, and hands-on;
- An environment that is free of distractions, with access to content 24/7; and
- Flexibility for scheduling, allowing students to learn when they learn best.

In Maryland, we should provide each student the absolute best educational environment in which he or she can thrive. Please join the 33 other States who have embraced this future-ready, public-school option and vote to approve this bill.

Pearson Online & Blended Learning recommends a **Favorable Committee report on HB 1170.**

Thank you,

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