

Good afternoon Senators,

My name is Matthew Ristau, and I am here to speak on behalf of the Senate Bill 706, Nonpublic Education Programs—Children with Disabilities—Cost of Teacher Salaries. I am currently a teacher at Kennedy Krieger High School in Baltimore City, and have been a teacher for almost 20 years. Additionally, I am pursuing a PhD in Instructional Leadership for Changing Populations at Notre Dame University of Maryland. I have also taught for Baltimore County Public Schools in their general education and special education high school programs. I have taught AP level science classes, as well as inclusion and self-contained special education classes. Prior to returning to Kennedy Krieger High School, after working for 12 years in Baltimore County Public Schools, I also served as a Behavioral Interventionist for half a school year. So, suffice it to say, I have seen and done many things in the educational arena.

My purpose in coming today is to testify on the impact salary parity would have on the students and staff in our non-public schools. As a public school teacher, I was witness to the thousands upon thousands of students our public schools are well equipped to serve. However, I was also witness to the few students for whom non-public schools are the only sustainable option. The students in our non-public schools were not failed by the public school system, but rather they simply require a different model. A model in which the efforts of the educator are less diffuse, but more concentrated; interventions are less global but more targeted; and educational programs that less communal and more individual. All of this is in response to IDEA, and the glorious task of educating all children within our society. Such effort is commensurate with the effort put forth by public school teachers, and mandated by the federal government. It then follows that our salaries be commensurate with not only our efforts but with our public school colleagues, who are also called by the same vocation.

Calling our schools “non-public” is a misnomer. Simply because we are outside of the local school system, does not mean our schools are severed from the ties of the local school system. Quite the opposite is true. Working with the population at my “non-public” school places us under greater scrutiny, not less; thus making our job and our efforts align more precisely to the demands as laid out in each and every student’s individualized education plan (IEP). Not only does this increase the diligence with which we serve our students, but also the quality of work

and level of responsibility we put forth. I support this bill because as one who has done many things in the field of education, I know that no effort is truly wasted when done with the good of the child in mind. Whether that effort happens in a public or non-public school, it is the job of this body to recognize that all teachers deserve the right to equal pay for our efforts regardless of our professional calling to teach the most vulnerable among us.

Thank you.