
HB 495 TESTIMONY:
Student



MARYLAND STUDENT COALITION

2022 Legislative Session

About Our Organization:

The Maryland Student Coalition (MSC) is an advocacy group comprised of secondary and post secondary school students working together to create and advocate for effective and equitable education policy.

MSC Leadership:

Jonathon T. DiPietro
Director

Hunter P. Craig
Deputy Director

Christopher D. Lidard
Associate Director

Lauren A. Raskin
Associate Director

Vinay K. Khosla
Associate Director

MSC Senior Associates:

Olivia Le (Anne Arundel County)
Maja Durkovic (Baltimore County)
Kyle Abosch (Cecil County)
Harshia Bhagat (Howard County)
Neha Dinesh (Howard County)
Noah Hanssen (Howard County)
Julia Littlefield (Howard County)
Chikamara Obioha (Howard County)
Sidd Shah (Howard County)
Elani Bui (Montgomery County)SB116
Senior Associates

marylandstudents.org

About this Document:

This document is a compilation of testimony collected and presented on the previously introduced 2021 version of the same bill, House Bill 753. This package contains relevant testimonials in favor of the current iteration of the Student Demonstrations Initiative, House Bill 495.

Additional questions can be directed to marylandstudentcoalition@gmail.com or you can visit our website at marylandstudents.org.

Testimony Package:

‘C’

**Students
and
Community Members**

Maryland Student Coalition

PACKAGE 'C'

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34	Trevor Norton	Former Student (Howard County)
35	Vinay Khosla	Student - <i>Legislative Affairs Coordinator of the Baltimore County Student Councils ("BCSC")</i>

*Please Note: Additional Organizations have supported this initiative, but did not submit written testimony in time to be filed with this package.

Please inquire for further information by contacting: jonathon.dipietro1@gmail.com

February 12, 2021

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

FROM: Abby Stafford, abbystafford2017@gmail.com, 240-252-9910
20406 Honeycrisp Lane, Apt F Germantown, MD 20876

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 student from Montgomery County in favor of House Bill 753.

The right of students to demonstrate on school grounds without fear of consequence is the only way to fulfill our constitutional right to freedom of speech. The passing of this bill would amplify student voices and recognize the importance of peaceful demonstration. It serves as our civic responsibility to stand up for the causes that are worth fighting for.

Our constitutional right to demonstrate should not be taken away simply because we are students at a public school. Peaceful demonstrations, on the grounds of school property especially, have been a powerful and effective tool to ensure that our voices cannot be ignored. I attended a student-organized walkout advocating for gun control in middle school, and became aware that many students who cared about the cause were too scared about consequences to stand up for their own safety. This is exactly why we, as students, need to be allowed our right to peaceful demonstrations.

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

February 12, 2021

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

FROM: Aisling Nay, aislingnay@gmail.com, (443)-859-5804
5530 Abbey Ln Salisbury, MD 21801

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 Student from Wicomico County, in favor of House Bill 753.

The ratification of House Bill 753 allows for public school students to engage in peaceful, organized demonstrations, without repercussions. When students are not faced with the fear of being punished by administrative seniors, they are more apt to use their voice, and speak out in favor of the peaceful demonstration. When doing so, students become more confident, and secure with their words. Students must be given the right to assemble, not only to build relationships and leadership skills, but also to create an impactful presence. There is strength in numbers.

As a student leader from the rural, underdeveloped, and under-resourced Eastern Shore of Maryland, I am a first hand recipient of the lacking leadership in my region. Many is a time I have shared public comment not only to the Wicomico County Council, but as well to the Wicomico County Board of Education, stressing the importance of a Student representative to sit on the local Board of Education. Without my persistent testimony, a regional leadership council would not have been created within my county. My student voice was not prohibited, allowing me to develop stronger leadership skills, just as the ratification of House Bill 753 would too.

For the grounds I have stated my testimony on, I urge the committee to supply a favorable report on House Bill 753.

February 12, 2021

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

FROM: Alex Horn

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 student from Howard County, in favor of House Bill 753.

With the recent wave of youth, and especially student activism, student demonstrations and protests have proved paramount to any successful societal or political reform. There are thousands of people across history leading the way for social justice, from the Civil Rights movement of the '60s to the Anti-Vietnam War movement to movements for democracy and self-determination across the world, students have always been at the forefront of activism. More recently, students have led movements like March for Our Lives, Sunrise Movement, and Black Lives Matter, and these movements have seen tremendous success in part because of young people's involvement. HB0753 aims to allow students greater opportunity to use their voice for positive change and social action. The voice of students cannot be hindered, it should only be encouraged. Students should be allowed and encouraged to bring activism and advocacy to their school, as it serves as a great learning opportunity and has a conduit for a life in advocacy.

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

Thank you.

February 12th, 2021

TO: Members of the Ways and Means Committee; Maryland House of Delegates
FROM: Andrew Sojka, 631-745-5759, andrewsojka2021@gmail.com
19405 Dry Seneca Ct, Poolesville, MD, 20837
RE: House Bill 753

POSITION: In Favor

Chair Kaiser, Vice Chair Washington, and Members of the Committee, I am writing as a student from Montgomery County, in favor of House Bill 753.

Advocacy is the foundation of our democracy. We have seen this time and time again throughout American history, from the March on Washington and Freedom Rides; Occupy Wall Street, People's Climate March, and Black Lives Matter protests, young people have continuously championed causes they believe in. Within all these movements lies a common denominator- a link that lies between each and every one. Institutions of learning acted as epicenters for organization and change. From being where club meetings took place to where marches started and ended, schools have cultivated some of the most essential movements in American history. When they didn't have the ability to go to courthouses or organize in the streets, students needed schools to be a place where their voices and actions could be seen and heard. For this reason, students need to have the ability to exercise their voice in a school setting.

As a student advocates myself, I have spent many hours participating in civic engagement endeavours myself. As a youth representative of the Black and Brown Coalition for Educational Equity, I have worked closely with my local chapter of the NAACP and minorities scholars program to organize sit ins for the sake of achievement of educational equity. And as founder and director of Si Podemos, a coalition of students across the DMV regions which champion for comprehensive immigration reform, I have worked closely with organizations such as the ACLU and Casa De Maryland to advocate for the passage of immigrant justice bills in the Maryland General Assembly. Taking action for the things in which I believed in was not only a fulfilling and educational experience, but one that I will remember and draw upon for the rest of my life.

It is for these reasons I mentioned above I urge you to issue a favorable report on HB0735.

February 12, 2021

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

FROM: Anthony Duan, duan.anthony@gmail.com
12th Grade - Centennial High School

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 student from Howard County, in favor of House Bill 753.

Tinker v Des Moines made clear that the right to protest could never be stopped, no matter the age or location of the demonstrators, except on private property. The schools belong to all of us -- and they must be politically permissive within reason to truly be so, for else they would become the restrictive territory of one single faction -- and if we students are to truly enjoy our democratic rights, then we must be free to point them out where they can have the biggest impact -- school.

Education offers us freedom of association -- our friends are their, our audience and our support. Where else can we unite to fight for the causes that matter to us -- be they action on climate, on gun control, on BLM or the rights of Muslims in Asia? And they truly do matter: we are citizens too, with ideas and interests of our own. Let us speak. And let us speak in school. If we can demonstrate in the streets, why are the buildings off-limits if we are not forcing any of our peers to join in? Yet there has to be a standard here because we cannot otherwise guarantee that administrators are free of political bias -- what if they suggest that a position they disagree with is merely an illegitimate one? An objective, predetermined standard is enough to rule out instances of inappropriate behavior, as well as extremism. Why should we need anything more? This way, it cannot be held at the whim of anyone -- even an administrator who attempts to be neutral but does not have a guide to do so, for which this standard gives the guide. Yet ultimately, liberal or socialist, progressive or conservative, we must have the right to speak out. And yes, that includes at school -- the best way to spread our message, as free speech is intended to do, and the best way to join a movement (with peers). We may, unlike adults, be restricted in where we can go at what time, but hopefully protests in schools will, if permitted, compensate for this difficulty.

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

February 12, 2021

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

FROM: Cacey Williams, caceymontelwilliams@gmail.com, 240-608-8463
9205 Traders Crossing suite L laurel,MD 20723

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 student from *Howard County*, in favor of House Bill 753.

As a candidate for the student member of the board of Howard County, it is of the utmost importance that I make all voices heard. This bill is very important to me because it allows universal rights for students to demonstrate on school grounds without fear of consequence. Elevates student voices and recognizes the importance of peaceful demonstration. Serves an important educational experience; civic responsibility.

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

February 12, 2020

TO: Members of the Ways and Means Committee; Maryland House of Delegates
FROM: Carmelli Leal, carmelli.leal@gmail.com, (443) 846-2409,
5220 Torrington Circle, Rosedale, MD 21237
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 student from Baltimore County, in favor of House Bill 753. I attend Eastern Technical High School as a 12th grader, and I am a voting constituent of Maryland's 8th legislative district.

Throughout history, it has been the voices of youth that are pushing for necessary change at the frontlines of global movements whether it be the climate crisis, civil rights and racial injustice, school safety, or even just the right to vote and have voices in our own education through our student members of boards of education. This bill is paramount to creating universal standards within Maryland that allow youth to partake in change-making in a way that is fair and safe for all parties involved.

Students have and will continue to demonstrate peacefully regardless of whether or not this bill passes. However, the passing of this bill allows for students to know that their legislators are on their side. This bill means that students can stand up for injustice when they see it and know that they won't be unjustly punished for their actions. Schools have historically been a hub for student activism and empowerment even longer than *Tinker v. Des Moines*. This right must be preserved.

More than empowerment, these peaceful demonstrations can educate students on what appropriate civic action can look like. In fact, here in the state of Maryland, we mandate civic education in our public schools. The Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR) states the following, "Students shall inquire about the historical development of the fundamental concepts and processes of authority, power, and influence with particular emphasis on civic reasoning in order to become informed,

responsible citizens, engage in the political process, and contribute to society,” under *Sec. 13a.04.08.01. Requirements for Social Studies Instructional Programs for Grades Pre Kindergarten — 12* in clause D.

In my freshman year during my AP US Government and Politics class, I learned that demonstrations were integral to resonating with the public as a whole and driving political change. Allowing students to partake in these peaceful demonstrations enables them to take hold of their civic responsibility in the most impactful way possible and in the safest way possible in our school buildings.

Additionally, the youth turnout rate for ages 18-29 within the United States for the 2018 midterm elections was only 35.6%, and these youth votes only made up 13.8% of the electorate according to the United States Census Bureau. This is because the youth often feel so disconnected from the political process. They feel as if their voices don't matter. This bill will show students that their voices matter and propel them into embracing other forms of good citizenship as well.

Eastern Technical High School has had our fair share of peaceful student demonstrations. Thankfully, our administration has generally been supportive of our student advocacy regarding racial injustice, mental health, and school safety. Not every student is this fortunate, and not every adult understands the value of students feeling empowered to use their voices.

When students feel empowered, they can become an advocate for themselves in their personal lives and in their own education leading them to perform better in the classroom. When students feel empowered, they have better self-esteem and mental health. When students feel empowered, they are better prepared for the real world ahead of them, and they are one step closer to being the globally competitive young adults that we all know they can be. After all, isn't that what school is for?

Therefore, I call for the committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 753 and empower student voices.

February 12, 2021

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

FROM: Christian Thomas, CThomas12225@gmail.com, 443-825-7609, 2806 Singer Woods Drive Abingdon MD 21009

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 student from Baltimore County, in favor of House Bill 753.

This bill is imperative for allowing universal rights for students to demonstrate on school grounds without fear of consequence, elevating student voices when they are often left unheard, and recognizing the importance of encouraging peaceful demonstration. It enables students to participate in an amazing educational experience, respond to their civic responsibility, and truly have an influence in making change.

Coming from a school district in which many school protests are organized in response to outrageous acts by students and staff, I have truly found the experiences both educational and fundamental in my understanding of society. If students are restrained from such acts, how are we to develop as assertive members in society? How are we to stand against the injustices of our world, as the many themes in our English classes and focuses in our social studies courses task us to do?

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

February 12, 2021

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

FROM: Ember Carrera, embercarrera@gmail.com, (240)457-8087
2722 Thurston RD, Frederick, MD 21704

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 student from Frederick County, in favor of House Bill 753.

As students, it is important that our political efficacy is nurtured. Around the country our elections have low voter turnout. Do get the people in the government of the people we need to have opportunities to see change when we are still school aged. The bill allows universal rights for students to demonstrate on school grounds without fear of consequence. Additionally, it elevates student voices and recognizes the importance of peaceful demonstration. Finally, it serves an important educational experience; civic responsibility.

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

February 12, 2021

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

FROM: Henry Meiser, henry.meiser@gmail.com, (240)-925-0600,
14286 Solomons Island Road South Solomons, Maryland 20688-0651

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 Student from Calvert County, submitting written testimony in favor of House Bill 753.

House Bill 753 allows the student voice to be heard. Currently, if a student, or group of students, decide upon peacefully protesting, they could be penalized for doing so. The First Amendment of the U.S. The Constitution states that “Congress shall make no law ... abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble. This fundamental right of United States citizens applies to all of its constituents, including students. If passed, House Bill 753 will allow students to peacefully congregate, without the fear of consequence. House Bill not only allows students to practice civic responsibility and share their voice, but it supports the First Amendment of the United States Constitution.

Student demonstrations are among the most important that occur in not only the U.S., but the world. The student voice is the voice of the future of the world, and House Bill 753 allows that voice to be heard, without condition. If this committee issues an unfavorable report on House Bill 753, you will be directly inhibiting a student’s ability to practice their skills of civic engagement, which is a required part of a Maryland student’s education.

For the reasons stated above, I urge the committee to issue a report in opposition of House Bill 753, and allow the student voice to be heard, without fear of consequence.

With highest respect,

Henry Meiser

February 12, 2021

TO: Members of the Ways and Means Committee; Maryland House of Delegates**FROM:** Jaimie Han, jshlove4@icloud.com, 443-890-9496
6478 Cornwall Dr. Unit 24**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 student leader from Carroll County, in favor of House Bill 753. I'm an eleventh grader who serves as a president for the Carroll County Student Government Association. After nearly five years of involvement with student government and dedicating time to speak up for student voices, it is only principled that I advocate for this bill.

Schools are a place to educate and cultivate the character of students so that they may be successful in their futures and civic responsibilities as adults. Our country's values, built on the foundation of democracy and relying on the peoples' will, are represented throughout many aspects of society, and one of those should be the schools in which we raise the next generations. When adults are privileged with the right to vote, they have the opportunity to impact their community with what they believe is right; their voices get to be heard, accepted, and taken into account for the best decisions moving forward. The first amendment in the Bill of Rights that was specifically written to ensure the peoples' basic rights includes the right to protest. The Civil Rights Movement, the women's suffrage movement, and many other organizations striving for equality made great strides with the fundamental right to protest. If students' voices are restricted in the school environment to speak up for their truths, what kind of example are we setting for them when they become adults?

In middle school, I participated in a silent walkout where we advocated against gun violence. The teachers and principals were made aware of the students' intentions, and so they allowed a time for us to walk altogether and created a space where students could be safely led out and return to class without disrupting the teachers and students who wished to remain in the classroom. Our voices were elevated through a form of protest, and having the adults around us understand and communicate with us was a large part of the impact we organized. This is exactly what the bill seeks.

Our schools should not be encouraging the suppression of student voices when they seek to speak out against the injustices they face; we deserve an education environment that instills the idea

that students can make the change they fight for. For the reasons stated above, I urge the committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 753.

February 12, 2021

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

FROM: Jesse Harris, Jr.; j.w.harris1103@gmail.com; 202-699-0144
15428 General Lafayette Blvd

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 student from Prince George's County, in favor of House Bill 753. My name is Jesse Harris, Jr. and I'm a current high school senior, Chief of Staff of the Maryland Association of Student Councils, and member of the Maryland Youth Advisory Council. Thank you for spending the time to read my testimony today.

The student voice is society's most valuable catalyst for change. We, as students, have proven how powerful our voice can be in classrooms, communities, and via social media. From federal, state, to local advocacy efforts, we have shown that we are civically engaged and have an urge to be true citizens who engage in democracy and social change.

Despite this, there are no protections that guarantee students the right to peacefully demonstrate their first amendment right at school. This often inhibits students from engaging in peaceful demonstrations at school in fear of punishment. House Bill 753 might also encourage students to engage in peaceful demonstrations at school for the purpose of bettering their communities for themselves and their peers. The effects of this bill would carry students beyond highschool as they will recognize instances in which there is a need for change and have had prior experiences advocating for social justice.

As a student who recognizes a need for protections on student demonstrations at school, I urge the committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 753.

Thank you and have a great day!

February 12, 2021

TO: Members of the Ways and Means Committee; Maryland House of Delegates**FROM:** Judy Nguyen, justjudyn@gmail.com, (240) 561-6804
43518 Abis St. Hollywood, MD 20636**RE:** House Bill 753: Education - Student-Organized Peaceful Demonstrations
- Student Discipline and Policy**POSITION: In Favor**

Hello Members of the Ways and Means Committee, I am writing to you today on behalf of myself and the students I represent. I am Judy Nguyen, a student at Leonardtown High School in St. Mary's County and the President of the St. Mary's Association of Student Councils.

Chair Kaiser, Vice Chair Washington, and Members of the Committee, I am writing as a student from St. Mary's County in favor of House Bill 753.

I wholeheartedly believe that the greatest asset to the United States Public Education System is the cultivation of students' critical thinking skills. The foundation of tomorrow's society is contingent on the passion and will of students today. Having the pleasure of writing to you today is evident of the great opportunities afforded to students, however, there is a necessity for more opportunities.

Implementing this bill not only protects students from being punished for organizing and participating in student demonstrations but it also encourages students to gather and to make their voices heard. Having this protection in place subconsciously creates an environment where student voices are valued and encouraged. The knowledge that students have created such an impact to initiate such a bill should be evident towards the power students have.

As a future member of society and the product of the Maryland Education system, I know what it feels like to be ignored and I also know what it feels like to be heard. The simple truth is that no one likes to be ignored especially if their rights are guaranteed and outlined in the Constitution. The First Amendment is a truth of the United States and should be promoted by the system that is such a huge part of many students' lives.

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

February 12, 2021

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

FROM: Julia Littlefield, juliac207@gmail.com, (301)367-9249
10054 Colonial Dr. Ellicott City MD

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 student from Howard County, in favor of House Bill 753.

Our system of government relies on civic engagement, free discourse, and voter participation. Every student in 10th grade takes US Government and Politics to understand our government and the role we play in making change. One of the fifteen Supreme Court cases emphasized in the curriculum is *Tinker v Des Moines*, the infamous decision that protected students' first amendment rights in school. We learn the value of student voices and the impact peaceful protest has on leaders. It only makes sense that we are encouraged and protected when we engage in the same demonstrations for change.

As students we lack the ability to vote and public demonstration is one of the best ways to gain the attention of local and statewide leadership. My first time leading a demonstration was in response to the school shooting in Parkland, Florida that killed 17 individuals. School no longer felt safe for me and many of my peers. Across the country on March 14, 2018 students walked out to demand gun control including my school, Burleigh Manor Middle School. The peaceful demonstration included a moment of silence for the Parkland victims and a national call to action to protect our classrooms. Young voices across the country were able to unite for a common cause and the demonstration resulted in action from policymakers. A month later, I organized another walkout to commemorate the victims of the school shooting at Columbine High School on April 20, 1999 and further demonstrate the need for gun control. Gun control is not the only issue that impacts students. In high school I organized another school walkout with my club Young Democrats to protest lack of legislation addressing climate change. It was another successful opportunity and that empowered me and my student body.

The opportunity to organize and participate in student demonstrations is one of the most impactful and accessible ways to fight for change. Not every student can participate in outside of school legislation rallies or lobbying groups, but school provides a platform for change. Additionally, some of my classmates are not allowed to attend marches and protest events

because of ideological differences from their parents. Making school a place where students can freely, peacefully organize without the threat of consequences provides students opportunities to express themselves with their peers. Major political and world issues directly affect students, thus our voice deserves to be in the conversation. Giving students the opportunity to peacefully protest without threat of retaliation demonstrates that our voices and our opinions are valued and deserve to be heard.

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

February 12, 2021

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

FROM: Keerti Venkat, keertisv.vt@gmail.com
12th Grade - Howard High School

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 student from Howard County, in favor of House Bill 753.

Students should have the right to peacefully protest, as we have freedom of speech as Americans. Students are the people who will grow to be the next leaders of this country, and it is vital that we learn to peacefully protest. Also, change comes from protest. As long as a protest is peaceful, students should reserve the right to peacefully protest for a cause.

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

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

FROM: Kevin A. Bokoum, kevinbokoum@gmail.com, (301) 393-7386
201 Brynwood St, Hagerstown, MD 21740

RE: House Bill 753: Education - Student-Organized Peaceful Demonstrations -
Student Discipline and Policy

POSITION: In Favor

Dear, Honorable Members of the Ways and Means Committee:

I, Kevin A. Bokoum, Student Member of the Washington County Board of Education, stand in favor of HB0753. My commitment to student activism and ensuring the student voice is heard is the reason I take this stance, even though many schools provide opportunities for students to engage in peaceful protest, that right is not protected, guaranteed, or even offered in many school systems: HB0753 seeks to protect students in their efforts to advocate for what they believe in.

Within schools, we hear of great leaders throughout history who exercised their god given, First Amendment right to freedom of speech. From highly known names like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and W.E.B Du Bois to lesser known names like Ella Baker and Pauli Murray, these influential figures exercised their right to free speech to evoke long lasting societal change.

In the summer, we saw so many Marylanders and students participating in peaceful protests and demonstrations throughout the State and Country. We saw students, parents, and educators all collectively participating in demonstrations to make sure that black lives do in fact matter.

During the summer, I attended a peaceful demonstration and I was able to express my first amendment right to speak and advocate for what I believed in. During this protest, I felt like I was a part of a movement - like my actions actually meant something. Students protesting is not a newfound idea - within Generation Z, students have refused to be silenced and have engaged in a multitude of protests, when they felt unheard. Throughout history, protests have proved to be one of the most effective tools in starting the domino effect of meaningful societal change. For example, the Montgomery bus boycott which took place from December 1955 to December 1956; this one protest alone was able to abolish the segregation within our buses and allow the country to progress towards a more altruistic, fair, and equal society.

People all have their own opinions and the undeniable right to express these opinions. If people weren't allowed to openly express themselves, then I probably wouldn't even be here right now, or even if I was, there would be many restrictions against me just because of the amount of melanin in my skin, my dark eyes and the porosity of my hair. A world where people are denied

to be true to themselves, regardless of their opinions, is not a world I want to be a part of. For this reason, I stand in full support of HB0753 - if passed, this bill will allow students to have their right to peacefully protest on school grounds protected through legislation, ultimately securing their right to exercise their constitutional rights as the framers intended.

For the reasons stated above, I urge the Ways and Means Committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 0753.

February 12, 2021

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

FROM: Kyle Abosch, kyle.abosch@gmail.com, (443) 593-9171
300 Pettinaro Dr. Apt E6
Elkton, MD 21921

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 student from Cecil County, in favor of House Bill 753.

The students' ability to peacefully demonstrate must be recognized since they have the ability to be just as, if not more impactful than their adult counterparts. Written into the Constitution as the First Amendment, civilians have been granted the right to peacefully assemble without the disruption of Congress. I believe this right must not be abridged by schools that may impose consequences on their students. This bill would be able to guarantee students their protection from a frightful school system that may seek to punish them for their lawful actions; thus allowing students to be recognized and further learn from their educational system in a separate manner.

I myself have many experiences when it comes to student demonstrations, on and off of the school campus. Whether it be the advocacy of Black Lives Matter, March for Our Lives, and other popular demonstrations, I have always taken an interest in the protection of lives that should not be lost. Although my advocacy has allowed me to connect more with students, teachers, and other staff at my school and across the county who share the same beliefs as myself, it may allow the school system to seek out and sever those connections to prevent further demonstrations; since students do not possess power, they must follow their school system or face further consequences. Therefore, there is a theoretical monopoly on student demonstrations that are held by the school system.

I am in favor of House Bill 753 because of my personal contributions to student demonstrations where I have invested a lot of time procuring the rights of students and the people they are connected to. With the passing of this bill, students will no longer fret about the hypothetical consequences that may be imposed by their school or county. For the reasons stated above, I urge the committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 753.

February 12, 2021

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

FROM: Lauren Perl, laurenperl46@gmail.com, 240-444-0180
16016 Vine Court, Olney MD 20832

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 high school student from Montgomery County, in favor of House Bill 753.

I full heartedly support HB 753, because I believe students should have a say in the policies that impact their daily lives. Too often, decisions that affect students, such as arming school resource officers and offering an abstinence preaching comprehensive sexual education curriculum, are made without student input. This needs to change. HB 753 allows universal rights for students to demonstrate on school grounds without fear of consequence, which will enable students to amplify their concerns to decision makers. Such protests serve as an important educational experience to students, who are learning how to be peacefully, civically engaged.

I am the National Policy Director for Generation Ratify and I am also the Field Organization Director for Montgomery County Students For Change. In these roles, I have mobilized thousands of students to protest in support of gun violence prevention efforts and the Equal Rights Amendment, and protest against the confirmation of Justice Brett Kavanaugh and Justice Amy Coney Barrett to the Supreme Court. Attending such protests empower students and enable students to learn about their legislative and judicial systems. Similarly, it allows students to feel like they are heard in a peaceful, constructive manner. When I was 15, I skipped school for the day to protest at the Supreme Court for reproductive freedom. I remember telling my AP Government teacher in advance why I would be absent, to which he responded that I am a unique student, because I take my commitment to learning about policy and law outside of the classroom, to the streets and the halls of Congress. For the past three years, this teacher has had me speak to his class about my political endeavors, because he understands that peaceful protests are educational opportunities for students, where they become leaders and advocates, combatting issues that plague their communities. I maintain that my experiences with protests have turned me into an eloquent public speaker and lobbyist, and have furthered my career ambitions in policy.

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

February 12, 2021

TO: Members of the Ways and Means Committee; Maryland House of Delegates**FROM:** Maja Durkovic, maja729@hotmail.com, 4439330729
6628 Blackhead Road, 21220**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 student from Baltimore County, in favor of House Bill 753.

HB0753 allows universal rights for students to demonstrate on school grounds without fear of consequence. It elevates student voices and recognizes the importance of peaceful demonstration. Student demonstrations serve as important educational experiences in civic responsibility. Students go through their entire school careers, 13 years, learning about the importance of civic engagement and responsibility. We are taught about the importance of freedom of assembly and the power of the people. This bill allows students to use their voice to assemble peacefully in school, something that must be guaranteed to all students across Maryland. Certain counties in Maryland, including Montgomery, already have protections in place for student demonstrations. This must be secured for all Maryland students. I have been fortunate enough to participate in many different groups of student advocates. We have assembled peaceful protests with support from our county, along with many that were completely student-run. This summer, a wonderful student demonstration in the name of racial justice took place. We were happy to have protections from county officials, but this needs to be carried into school buildings. Students are not exempt from the protections of freedom of speech.

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

February 12, 2021

TO: Members of the Ways and Means Committee; Maryland House of Delegates**FROM:** Megan Williams, megantaylorwilliams@gmail.com, 410-245-1904,
8763 Carriage Hills Drive, Columbia 21046**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 graduate of the Howard County Public School System and the University of Maryland, College Park, and as a resident from Howard County in favor of House Bill 753.

This bill is of great significance to myself, my siblings, and students I've personally cared for in Howard County. We must extend universal rights for students to demonstrate on school grounds without fear of consequence. Young voices are systematically oppressed and ignored, teaching students that their opinions don't matter until the magic age of 18. We certainly know this is not true. Younger generations should have a say in their future and their present existence. We must implement this legislation because it will allow for student voices to be elevated, while demonstrating the importance of peaceful action. Not only will it give voice to those frequently ignored, but HB0735 also serves to teach students civic responsibility.

I did not know my power as a student to help and fight for others until I was in college. As a high schooler at Hammond in Columbia, I saw my peers chastised and punished for peacefully protesting with duck tape on their lips. It was important to those students that they show their support for their cause without harming or disrupting school activities, but they were still punished by administration. I didn't even get to learn what they were protesting about because it was shut down so quickly.

Just as in daily life, in school students should be allowed to utilize their first amendment right to peaceful demonstration to teach others about something they care about, inspire change, and hopefully from those experiences they can learn about how to make this world a better place, without fear of repercussions or penalty. The student demonstrators today are the future changemakers that will help make this world a better place for all. I urge you to issue a favorable report on HB0735 and stand for students' rights across the state of Maryland.

February 12, 2021

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

FROM: Noah Hanssen; noahkai.hanssen@howardcc.edu; 443-761-9606
9113 Dunloggin Rd

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 student from Howard County, in favor of House Bill 753.

I am in favor of this bill as a graduate of the Howard County Public School System because I strongly believe in giving our students the tools to demonstrate effectively and safely. Allowing universal rights for students to demonstrate on school grounds without fear of consequence, which this bill dictates, will have the positive effect of elevating student voices, teaching them the importance of peaceful demonstration, and serving the important function of educating students on their civic responsibility in a Democracy. The right to protest and demonstrate is a cornerstone of any democratic society, and giving students the tools to both make use of and practice this right will make for stronger, more experienced advocates in the future.

As a student, I had not participated in the opportunities to protest that I was given, however, I had many friends and classmates who did and it is very clear to me now that these were extremely beneficial experiences for them, and I regret not taking advantage of them now. Some of the most driven, intelligent and motivated students I have known were often engaged in activism and advocacy that included organizing protests and demonstrations, these are skills that I believe will assist them greatly in the future. This legislation will ensure that students can more freely engage in this important process without fear of consequence. This will also better regulate these demonstrations so that we can also protect these important student voices.

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

February 12, 2021

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

FROM: Peter Banyas, *Vice-Chair, Legislative Affairs Committee,*
Howard County Association of Student Councils

RE: House Bill 753: Education - Student-Organized Peaceful
Demonstrations - Student Discipline and Policy

POSITION: **In Favor**

The United States is governed by a myriad of codes and laws, all of which act to uphold and implement our fundamental Constitutional principles. The question before you today is whether or not to provide a Maryland common law foundation to truly apply the 1st Amendment.

Chair Kaiser, Vice-Chair Washington, and Members of the Committee, I write to you today as a Student from Howard County, and I strongly urge you to support House Bill 753.

Student demonstrations have long been a driving force for cultivating the leaders of tomorrow and promoting positive change. It's been an invaluable experience to demonstrate in both middle and high school because it has allowed me and hundreds of other students to stand up, share our views, and be civically engaged in preparation to be the voters of tomorrow. The public school system exists to provide every American with an education, with the goal of preparing them for life in this country. Thus, civic education and experience is a critical component to empowering students to participate in government and politics. It's a deep irony to learn about student protests in our history and government textbooks while we are not given a standardized means to do so, leaving our right to protest up to individual school officials. The ability to deny Americans their rights ought to never be in the hands of a single principal. By supporting HB 753, you can give students the peace of mind and unfettered opportunity to start to experience the rights and privileges of full fledged citizens.

If you are concerned about kids skipping out on school without fear of punishment, don't be. This Bill ensures a process of 48-hour advance notice and authorizes counties to determine guidelines for the time, place, and manner of expression to ensure that all demonstrations are done safely and in abidance by school rules.

The issue at stake here is not of lawless students versus a structured school environment. It is a choice between structured civic engagement and uncodified opportunity inequality. By not supporting this bill, you choose to allow some administrators to stop or punish their students while others are encouraged--therefore creating a stark contrast in civic engagement that will

already put those students on track for a life of either political participation or disaffectedness.

It is in our state and country's best interest to foster political participation from a young age. This bill simply lays the groundwork to make our school systems legally prepared to accommodate those fundamental rights to speech and to assembly.

Let us look towards the future with hope, and empower our youth to make that future a reality. Let us approve HB753.

Thank you.

February 12, 2021

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

FROM: Phoebe Chambers, phoebe.chambers@icloud.com, 240-801-0836

11409 Ridge Mist Terrace, Potomac, Maryland 20854

RE: House Bill 753: Education- Student-Organized Peaceful Demonstrations -
Student Discipline and Policy

POSITION: In Favor

Like all other Maryland high school students, I took a course in local, state, and national United States government. One of the first lessons we cover is on the Bill of Rights. The first amendment clearly states that “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof, or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances,”. The “people” mentioned in the Constitution of the United States of America includes students. This has been demonstrated in several Supreme Court cases, including *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District*, which protects free speech in public schools.

Chair Kaiser, Vice Chair Washington, and Members of the Committee, I am writing as a student from Montgomery County, in favor of House Bill 753.

Our country’s political climate does not begin to affect the average citizen once they graduate high school, but rather as soon as they are born. Students have to regularly practice lockdown drills in case of a school shooting, learn about a world they will inherit that is increasingly suffering from the impacts of climate change, and watch their parents struggle with paying for healthcare. We are always told that we should be able to apply what we have learned inside the classroom to the real world, so why should that not apply to our political beliefs and free speech rights as Americans?

Allows universal rights for students to demonstrate on school grounds without fear of consequence. Elevates student voices and recognizes the importance of peaceful demonstration. Serves an important educational experience; civic responsibility.

I myself have attended student-organized walkouts for gun control in the wake of the Parkland shooting. That experience taught me more than any given day in high school. I felt like I was making a difference and allowing my voice to be heard with other students in my Maryland community. Students are people too, and we deserve the same rights as grown adults because the issues we are protesting affect us.

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

February 12, 2021

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

FROM: Riley Macon, rsmacon03@gmail.com
12th Grade - Reservoir High School

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 student from Howard County, in favor of House Bill 753.

Students have a unique perspective that allows them to remain in tune with societal changes across generations. These societal changes however, only come about by magnifying voices at the ground level. Students are those voices. They should have every right to advocate for and protest injustice, prejudice, and discrimination.

Any administrative dispute over these rights is an overt act of bias and discrimination towards student voices. How can we evolve towards a more just society if we pick and choose who gets to speak out?

We can't. As equal citizens under the law, our voices should be heard, whether unpopular or not.

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

February 12, 2021

TO: Members of the Ways and Means Committee; Maryland House of Delegates**FROM:** Rosalind Marfo, rosalindmarfo29@gmail.com, 443-720-9378
44 Hanover Rd, Reisterstown, MD 21136**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 Student from Baltimore County, in favor of House Bill 753.

The older generation is constantly saying that mine is the generation that will save us all. They say that we are the future. The future leaders, innovators, and change-makers. But, how will we be these things if, as youth, we are not freely allowed to flex these budding characteristics? When students feel that our voices are being used and heard, it is only then that we truly believe in our power. HB753 allows universal rights for students to demonstrate on school grounds without fear of consequence. It elevates student voices and recognizes the importance of peaceful demonstration in the creation of civically engaged Americans.

As a testament to this country's growth, the crowds that we saw during the peaceful protests of 2020 were a beautiful display of diversity in terms of gender, race, and, most notably, age. But personally, what was even more powerful than these televised phenomena were the quiet ones. The small town protests like the one held at Franklin High School, where POC and white citizens alike gathered to speak out against police brutality and racial injustices. It was so unbelievably heartening to see that the people that I had grown up with, the individuals that I had seen develop from children to young adults, were standing with me to call out the authorities on their lawless behavior. It is an amazing thing to know that you are not alone. It is a wonderful thing to know that people care enough to not only make grand and pacifying speeches, but also to simply *do*. Right now, Chair Kaiser, Vice Chair Washington, and Members of the Committee, you have the chance to do. You have the chance to show that you genuinely care for the young ones that you

represent, that you really do believe that we are the future. Please do not pass this opportunity up. For the reasons stated above, I urge the committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 753.

February 12, 2021

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

FROM: Sabrina Thaler, sabirose64@gmail.com, 443-379-2837
115 Carolstowne Rd Reisterstown, MD 21136-6501

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 student from Baltimore County, in favor of House Bill 753.

It's an American value, a cornerstone of national legal progress, and a basis for legislative change in this country. It's what has moved gun action to the forefront of the Democratic agenda, what catalyzed the celebration of Earth Day on college campuses, what granted students a hand at the wheel of the 1961 Freedom Rides. Uninhibited student voice – what House Bill 753 seeks to enshrine in Maryland law – is one of the most willful, tangible threads in the American journey. Its importance goes beyond our basic democratic right as citizens to assemble. The ability of young people to use their campuses as platforms for activism is responsible for the climate of empathetic lawmaking present within your chamber today.

As it stands, administrators in Maryland are left with virtually free will to dismiss student protests, punish peaceful activism on their campuses, and in turn, move academic power structures into a dangerous cycle of regression. To treat student will as something threatening, and, as such, expendable, is one of the worst disservices that can be afforded to a constituency. The passage of House Bill 753 would demonstrate to the Maryland student populace that our strength and movement is valued more than the maintenance of “calm” in our school environments – which is, in reality, a thin guise for complacency and apathy. With every passing second, students in Maryland fear for their futures for a striking myriad of reasons. To prevent us from advocating for ourselves, for our planet, for our homes and jobs and lives, is vile hypocrisy. Students meet these countering forces every day in their schools. House Bill 753 is a chance to finally expose and dismiss the danger posed by unwarranted restriction on student voice.

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

February 12, 2021

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

FROM: Shreyas Ramulu, STR757@gmail.com
12th Grade - River Hill High School

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 student from Howard County, in favor of House Bill 753.

Students should have the opportunity and ability to advocate for what they believe in. Additionally with this right, students can become more educated on and involved in political issues they face.

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

February 12, 2021

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

FROM: Sophia Brandt, sophia@fuzzymagic.com, (240) 338-4726
19521 Lewis Orchard Lane, Poolesville MD 20837

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 student from Montgomery County, in favor of House Bill 753.

In short, not only will this Bill be essential to the uplifting of student voices and promotion of student advocacy, but it will also offer opportunities for students to engage themselves in civic responsibility. Although a US Government course is a graduation requirement for all Maryland High Schoolers, a class in civic duty is nowhere near as impactful as the ability to participate in the gears of the democratic process. Allowing students to engage in peaceful demonstrations without fear of consequences is an incredibly valuable experience; it imbues a sense of power and responsibility among the people who will one day be leading this country. Taking a visible stand about an issue will always be more impactful than memorizing the Bill of Rights. So, isn't it more prudent to encourage students to speak up? Even though we are minors, our voices have tremendous potential, especially if we are allowed to fully exercise our rights as American Citizens. We need to understand the gravity of our station as the next generation of leaders, and one of the best ways to do that is through peaceful protest.

On September 20th, 2019, thousands of protestors from across DC, Maryland, and Virginia gathered in the nation's capital to participate in a global climate strike, one of many that were taking place worldwide. As an environmental advocate and member of the Global Ecology Program at Poolesville High School, I was thrilled to have the opportunity to be part of a larger movement and demand immediate action to address our climate crisis. I began making a plan to get myself to DC to join the protest: talking to friends and arranging transportation. Then, MCPS announced that any participation in a climate strike outside school would not count as an excused absence, and my planning came to an abrupt halt. Unexcused absences, no matter the reasoning, can have pretty severe consequences, including counselor intervention, or an inability to access make-up work that may be crucial to success in a course. In the end, despite my planning, I had no mode of safe transportation and had to stay home. I could not attend to add my voice to the thousands in DC, and I deeply regret it.

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

February 12, 2021

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

FROM: *Sophia Porter, sophiadance2131@gmail.com*
(302)983-652 48 Austin's Way Elkton, MD 21921

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 Student from Cecil County, in favor of House Bill 753.

Allows universal rights for students to demonstrate on school grounds without fear of consequence. Elevates student voices and recognizes the importance of peaceful demonstration. Serves an important educational experience; civic responsibility. As a generation of students who are trying to become more knowledgeable in what is going on in society, and students who want to pursue social justice in the future, this Bill will be beneficial for us to peacefully lead others. Another point, our generation uses social media to have our voices and opinions be heard each day. And allowing students to have another, organized, outlet that will visually show them in real time, the effect they have on others.

A few years ago, students tried to hold a "Walk Out". However, instead of standing up for what we believed in, we were too afraid of getting suspended. Therefore, nothing happened. We are aware that there are some students who would take advantage of this opportunity, but we are also willing to do whatever it takes to be able to have our voices heard. As the Student Member of the Board of Education, I will personally work hard to inform the students of Cecil County Public Schools how to respectfully use this new power, and how not to abuse it because with the changes being made to today's society, I believe the students of Maryland should be able to speak up and be listened to without being reprimanded.

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

February 12, 2021

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

FROM: Thalia Harris

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 student from Baltimore County, in favor of House Bill 753.

This bill is extremely important to pass as it allows students to participate in events that hold meaning to them without fear of repercussions from their school, with limitations. Students are the youth of this state, and decisions now will continue to affect them for years to come. As a student myself, this bill would allow me to show support for movements that work to benefit me.

February 12, 2021

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

FROM: Thomas Foulkes, Thomas@Foulkes.net, 410-474-0131
4770 Howard Place, Chesapeake Beach MD, 20732

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 student from Calvert County, in favor of House Bill 753.

House Bill 753 allows universal rights for students to demonstrate on school grounds without fear of consequence. This serves to elevate student voices and recognizes the importance of peaceful demonstration. Additionally peaceful demonstrations serve as an important educational experience in civic responsibility and how important it is to be educated on the issues that are important to you.

After the Parkland shooting in 2018 students at my middle school were going to do a walk out, we were told that we were not allowed to leave the school building and that it must be in the cafeteria and further the "walkout" then became a joke and no one who actually cared about the impacts of the walkout (advocating for school safety and common sense gun laws) actually did it as we would have had to miss class to do it. Legal protection for this type of demonstration would have helped the walkout have actual meaning and maybe then convince local legislatures to begin making schools more safe.

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

February 12, 2021

TO: Members of the Ways and Means Committee; Maryland House of Delegates**FROM:** Thomas Williams, twilliams8849@gmail.com, 410-206-5506
8763 Carriage Hills Drive, Columbia 21046**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 graduate of the Howard County Public School System, a student at Howard Community College, and as a resident from Howard County in favor of House Bill 753.

You need to support this bill. Students should not be penalized for speaking up peacefully for things they care about. When you're young, people frequently discount your opinions and voice. Peaceful demonstration is a way for students to raise their voices and bring attention to an issue maybe other students don't know a lot about. If students engage in protest, they should not be punished, especially if they are punished to the same degree as someone who has clearly acted with malice or ill intent. Student demonstration should not be an offense if it is peaceful.

I personally did not protest until I went with my sister to a few marches in DC. By then, I had already graduated from High School. What I do know now is that it makes a difference. I have learned more from peaceful protest, and been inspired to take action on other issues because of it. Students across Maryland should be encouraged to learn in this way if they wish, not punished.

In conclusion, I believe student peaceful demonstration can serve an important role in schools, and no punishment should be administered for students who choose to engage. I urge you to issue a favorable resort on HB0735 and stand for students' rights across the state of Maryland.

February 12, 2021

TO: Members of the Ways and Means Committee; Maryland House of Delegates
FROM: Toluwanimi Dapo-Adeyemo, toludapoadeyemo@gmail.com, 240-993-9517,
8729 Pheasant Creek Place, Indian Head, MD, 20640
RE: House Bill 753: Student Discipline and Policy

POSITION: In Favor

Chair Kaiser, Vice Chair Washington, and Members of the Committee, my name is Toluwanimi Dapo-Adeyemo, I am currently one of the State Legislative Affairs Coordinators of the Maryland Association of Student Councils, and also the Chief of Staff of the Charles County Association of Student Councils. I am writing as a concerned student leader from Charles County, in favor of House Bill 753.

Our power as the younger generation comes from our determination to make change. As students, we have a unique perspective on issues that adults may not be aware of, because of how times have changed and how our circumstances have evolved. The opinions of youth are invaluable to the progress of our society as a whole, and it is simply counterintuitive to not secure the freedom of these students to speak out for what they believe is right. This bill would allow universal rights for students to demonstrate on school grounds without fear of consequence. Elevating student voices and recognizing the importance of peaceful demonstration, it serves an important educational experience. I believe that this will be a most beneficial step towards real change enacted by Maryland youth. For the reasons stated above, I urge the committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 753.

February 12, 2020

TO: Members of the Ways and Means Committee; Maryland House of Delegates**FROM:** Trevor Norton, 240-427-7535 crytontrev@gmail.com
8545 Murphy Road Laurel, MD 20723**RE:** House Bill 753: Education - Student-Organized Peaceful Demonstrations
- Student Discipline and Policy**POSITION: In Favor**

The right for free speech is a topic that no citizen envisioned themselves writing in modern society, as it is not a privilege, rather a basic human right. In the United States, we have had various cases, such as *Tinker v. Des Moines*, where students across the nation took action to speak their voice, their mind, and unified for a common goal, showing that the voice of a student is just as powerful as their adult counterparts and should be treated as such. It seems almost hypocritical for the United States and other democratic nations to condemn totalitarian regimes like China and North Korea for censoring the public and the youth, but are we not doing the same? As a recent graduate from the Howard County Public School System, Reservoir High School, I was able to experience first-hand the censorship students face, unable to speak freely on issues that may impact them for the rest of their lives, issues that may even impact them as students.

Though, I am only 18 years old, only a child in comparison to some government officials in the legislature and other positions, I am still a citizen, with the ability to vote, advocate, and have a positive impact on the community. With the ability to speak freely in school, a lack of censorship will help students become more outspoken on issues, becoming advocates in their schools. Within the last two years, I remember joining millions of other students across America in at least two in-school protests, protesting climate change and the need for gun reform. Though these are two very contested issues, among the majority of Americans teens and youth, these issues become far less divided, becoming more unified than our adult counterparts. The

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patronizing way adults look to the American youth within this generation is appalling and must come to an end. With powerful advocates like Greta Thunberg, it should no longer be a question as to *if* students should have a voice in school, but rather *why* they currently do not.

Though, I realize that I am only a student attending my local community college, and I am only 18, I do have power. I have the power to vote, the power to advocate on vital issues, and the power to create change, and that will not be stripped by any government. I look now to the Ways and Means committee of Maryland to help students make a change, help make their voice heard, help all of us shape a better future, because as society becomes more and more polarized, unification among America's youth is vital, and would help create a more democratic nation, one that *all* students, adults, and Americans would be proud to live in.

I thank you for taking the time to read my testimony, and I do hope this has made your decision on the issue easier. As always, I will continue to advocate for students' rights, students' voices, and the power of a voice, as this is not a privilege, but a right.

February 12, 2021

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

FROM: Vinay Khosla vinaykhosla13@gmail.com, (512) 787-2715
10875 Sandringham Road, Cockeysville MD, 21030 (42B)

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 student from Baltimore County, in favor of House Bill 753.

HB753 allows for the extension of the right for students to demonstrate on school grounds without fear of consequence to all students in each of Maryland's 23 counties. Right now there exist massive inconsistencies in the ability and right to demonstrate of students across the state which in turn has created an unfair and inequitable distribution of the student voice. It must be realized that education extends far beyond the classroom and that each school district across the State of Maryland seeks to not only produce educated citizens but also civically engaged ones. Consequently, the right to protest without fear of punishment, in any form, is one necessary for students to be the civically engaged leaders of tomorrow. Any undue restriction on such a right on school grounds, which most students are not permitted to leave for over 30 hours of the week, is a severe hindrance to a student's dual functioning as a citizen. It should never be a choice between being a student and an engaged citizen. It should never be a choice between quality/continuity of education and standing up for just causes. However, the state of current statutes does exactly this, cornering students into an unimaginable choice.

I myself am lucky enough to attend school in Baltimore County and thus do not face penalization or consequence should I choose to protest on school grounds. In fact, in freshman year (2018) a number of students at Dulaney High School, where I attend, organized a rally in support of the then burgeoning March for Our Lives movement. The rally coincided with a portion of the school day and students were excused from class on a voluntary basis to participate in the rally. Only such a policy allowed for me to attend the event and advocate for stricter gun control laws and increased school security. The event was highly empowering and allowed for students of all backgrounds to feel as if their voice were being heard and affecting tangible change. The empowerment of students should be every district's goal, as should policies which allow for such empowerment to be feasibly affected.

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