

March 8, 2022

Education, Health, & Environmental Affairs Committee

Chair Senator Pinsky, Vice Chair Senator Kagan, and the members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak before you today in favor of SB 786-Curriculum Transparency and Publication Act.

For the record, my name is Amy Adams. I am a parent of 3 school age children in Baltimore County. I am the daughter of a 30 year special educator. I worked as a psychiatric nurse prior to starting my family. I am also a leader of a grassroots advocacy group of parents and students called The Baltimore County Parent and Student Coalition, Inc. Over the last 2 years, we have connected and collaborated with similar parent groups in 20 Maryland counties.

One benefit of the virtual school experience was that parents got a window into schools, classrooms, and learning. In a word: transparency. We got to see what kids were learning, what teachers were teaching, and how schools were using their time. Perhaps the thing heard most often from other parents during the past 2 years, and occasionally myself, is: "I had no idea." We had no idea this teacher was so organized, our child was so confused about a specific concept, or how much or how little learning actually occurs during their kid's school day.

After watching my younger 2 children struggle, I started by writing to their teachers and then to the administrators in the curriculum departments and then to board members asking for more information about specific recent curriculum changes. I noticed a shift in curriculum over the span of my 3 kid's school experience, current ages 11th, 8th and 5th grades. The change in the curriculum or the ways in which foundational skills were being taught negatively affected my children's' success. And I was curious why. I looked at the Maryland Report Card and saw that academic proficiency rates have been declining across the state for years before the pandemic.

I then became a very active participant in board meetings and committee meetings over the last 2 years. I and the members of our group are actively invested in making our schools successful because it will directly benefit our children.

I have been told that a summary of curriculum is available online. BCPS calls it Year at a Glance. I have also been told that detailed curriculum information is unable to be shared because it is protected as intellectual property. I was encouraged to schedule a time to meet with department administrators at their office during the workday in order to view curriculum. I did take advantage of that, but most families are not able to do so.

Changes to curriculum are discussed in committee meetings that occur during the workday a couple of times each month. Rarely are these changes communicated clearly to parents that are brought to the full board meetings that are held in the evenings.

Most parents are not opposed to changes in curriculum but want to be informed when they occur and provided with an opportunity to ask questions.

A couple of weeks ago, I testified in favor of a similar house bill that was specific to Baltimore County. Representatives of the BCPS school board who opposed the need for legislation to promote curriculum

transparency stated that our county already had this available to the public online. When the committee looked at the website during the meeting, it was discovered that the website was mostly blank. BCPS explained that the holes in the information available was due to the ransomware attack that occurred in November of 2020. Since that meeting, more content has appeared online, but it does not include each subject, the unit topics with identified textbooks, approved online programs, and websites.

I appreciate the intent of this bill is not to burden the classroom teachers, their primary role in the classroom is so vital to the success of our students. We are not asking for daily lesson plans to be published. That type of detailed information is available in Schoology accounts for BCPS parents. We think it is a reasonable expectation, in a world where almost everything is available online, for the very qualified and knowledgeable administrators to oversee the online publication of the up-to-date curriculum.

Strong schools create strong and thriving communities. Passing this bill would allow a stronger partnership between schools and parents. There's great power in this kind of openness. It can strengthen school communities, allow parents to see what's happening in their children's schools and classrooms, and provide students more of the support they need.

SB 786 is our way to keep the transparency gained during remote school and build on it. Taxpayers – parents included – should be able to review what public schools are teaching. This sounds simple, but without this bill, our state had made it difficult for taxpayers to access this material. Policies that require parents to physically visit a school district's office to see the school's reading list, or that limit the times of day during which someone can access the material or filing formal FOIA or PIA requests are obstacles to civic engagement.

I ask for a favorable consideration of Senate Bill 786 to strengthen curriculum transparency across the state of Maryland. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Amy Adams