

March 22, 2022

The Honorable Paul G. Pinsky
2 West
Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: HB 118, Excused Absences for Mental Health Needs (Del. Alonzo Washington)

Dear Members of the Committee:

My name is LaTonya Ward, I am a resident of Prince Georges County, District 25. I am writing to ask for your support on HB 118, a bill that requires a local board of education to excuse as a lawful absence at least one day in each quarter of each school year due to a student's mental health needs. A local board may not require a note from a physician to excuse such an absence. I think this bill would greatly benefit children in middle and high school.

As the parent of a teen with intellectual and learning challenges, I believe this bill would benefit my child and his peers. Like many students managing through the pandemic, my son spent his last year of middle school and first year in high school in a virtual learning environment. The transition from in-person to an all virtual format took a tremendous toll on his mental health. This school year, as students returned to in-person learning he has done fairly well with the change, but there are days where he could use a mental break to regroup from the rigors of keeping up with covid protocols, social distancing, and staying on top of assignments all while working through a number of learning differences. He often works late into the night and on weekends to maintain the rigors of the academic work. There is very little down time, and he often feels overwhelmed. Having one or two days throughout the school year to have mental space to mentally refresh without penalty would be advantageous to his learning success.

Just this past December and January, the children had to return to virtual learning in Prince Georges County, due to a continued spike in covid cases. It appears that our new normal will be living with covid-19 and continued incorporation of the virtual learning environment when necessary. I feel that passage of this particular legislation would provide our children some mental respite. I urge you to consider full support of this bill.

Thank you for your service to the state and the community.

Kind Regards,



LaTonya Ward
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