



HB848 EDUCATION - PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS - VIRTUAL LEARNING PROGRAMS

March 3, 2022

WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE

OPPOSE

Jeanette Ortiz, Esq., Legislative & Policy Counsel (410.703.5352)

Anne Arundel County Public Schools (AACPS) opposes **HB848 Education - Public Charter Schools - Virtual Learning Programs**. This bill alters the definition of "public charter school" to include a virtual learning program. It requires professional staff of a virtual learning program of a public charter school to be subject to certain certification provisions established for professional staff of other public schools.

While this bill is well-intentioned, it is important to note that local school systems are already fully authorized to provide appropriate virtual learning opportunities under existing law. AACPS initiated the Virtual Academy, the only virtual school in the State, this school year. Our Virtual Academy has been showcased by MSDE due to its rigorous and purposeful structures, schedules, and organization. MSDE has also highlighted our hiring practices and professional learning.

While AACPS appreciates the bill's intent to expand virtual learning opportunities for Maryland students, we strongly oppose expanding the definition of a public charter school to include applications to create virtual, or cyber, charter schools. AACPS opposes legislation that permits internet-based virtual charter schools that promote home schools.

AACPS remains committed to elevating all students and eliminating all gaps. We recognize individuals who use student data, reflect on their practice, and engage in professional learning as highly effective educators. Such educators enhance their knowledge and skills to increase student learning in their classrooms, at their schools, and in our school district. AACPS believes that the quality of education is directly dependent on the quality of the teacher workforce, which is directly impacted by the school system's ability to recruit and retain high-quality educators. We currently do this without legislation, and as such, have concerns about some of the prescriptive language as we believe school districts should retain flexibility to best align with strategic initiatives for their programs.

AACPS believes that the current law provides a sound framework for the authorization and operation of high quality public charter schools in Maryland. We support State and local efforts to pursue the effective use of virtual learning initiatives and will continue to support programs to optimize the use of technology in improving student instruction. AACPS recognizes the value and need to continuously improve student access to high quality virtual learning programs but opposes amending the charter school law to authorize virtual, cyber charter schools. This legislation is not a necessary or appropriate means to advance virtual learning in Maryland's public schools.

Accordingly, AACPS respectfully requests an **UNFAVORABLE** committee report on HB848.