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Budget and Taxation Committee
Chair, Capital Budget Subcommittee

Chair, Senate Democratic Caucus



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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony of Senator Craig J. Zucker
Senate Bill 617 - Local School Systems - Equivalent Access Standards - Digital Tools
(Equivalent and Nonvisual Access Accountability Act for K-12 Education)
House Ways and Means Committee
March 24th, 2022
1:00pm
Position: SUPPORT

Good afternoon Chairman Atterbeary, Vice Chairman Washington, and distinguished members of the committee. It is my pleasure to testify today in **support of Senate Bill 617 - Local School Systems - Equivalent Access Standards - Digital Tools (Equivalent and Nonvisual Access Accountability Act for K-12 Education)**.

Fundamentally, this legislation is designed to ensure equivalent access to educational resources that are procured by local school districts for students with disabilities, including blindness. Too often, companies that provide educational technology inaccurately describe the capabilities of the program or tool they are selling.

Although school districts do their best to procure and create materials that are accessible to all students, there is currently limited recourse available if they inadvertently purchase a product with limited capabilities. Senate Bill 617 creates a civil liability for a vendor that does not meet legally mandated equivalent access standards and refuses to fix the product in a timely manner.

The legislative text has been updated from its original introduction in the 2021 Legislative Session to reflect a longer lead time for implementation, adjust the State agencies involved to ensure expertise, and indemnify State and local boards of education should a tool not meet equivalent access standards.

Senate Bill 617 is the culmination of months of work on the bill text with advocates, school systems, the Maryland State Department of Education, and stakeholders. Further and minor clarifying amendments may be necessary, but I am confident that its implementation will benefit all kids in Maryland public schools. This is a very important step to ensure all students have equal access to education.

I urge a favorable report on Senate Bill 617. Thank you for your kind consideration.