

Maryland House Bill 649

March 14, 2023

Chair, Vice Chair and Members of the Committee,

I am writing to request a **FAVORABLE with an Amendment** vote on this bill by your committee. As the bill is written, it does not include a VERY important group of children and parents. Perhaps the ones who need this bill the greatest. I've included my amendment below. I've watched over the past decade child after child slip further and further behind in the public-school classrooms in Maryland. Children with learning differences are the greatest risk to falling further and further behind in a system where the children are consistently not making any growth in reading and math. This is evident in the recent Maryland test scores. I don't think I need to go over them, as it's been all over the news for the past few weeks.

Are you all familiar with Dyslexia? Dyslexia is a language-based learning disability. Dyslexia refers to a cluster of symptoms, which result in difficulties with specific language skills, particularly reading. Students with dyslexia usually experience difficulties with other language skills such as spelling, writing, fluency and pronouncing words. It is referred to as a learning disability because dyslexia can make it very difficult for a student to succeed academically in the typical instructional environment. Dyslexics often need special education, special accommodations, or extra support services at school. It's believed that between 5 and 10 percent of people are Dyslexic or 1 in 5 children in a classroom. People with dyslexia don't outgrow it, but the sooner in life a child is given access to the proper instruction, supports and environment the less chance of their Dyslexia becoming a life long struggle.

I am a mother of 3 Dyslexic children. They all struggled to learn to pick up reading in the public school system here in Maryland. My oldest was reading on a Kindergarten level going into 3rd grade. This was 7 years ago that we began our dyslexia journey, and I became an advocate for children. I ended up pulling my children from the county school system and have since placed them in a school that specialized in educating children with learning differences. Mind you, this was all pre-pandemic. Sending them to this school did not come without a huge expense to our family. An expense that no family should ever have the burden to pay to have their children learn to read and write and be confident in that. We pulled them from an unhealthy environment that didn't know how to fully support them. An environment where their confidence in themselves was nearly crushed b/c of how stupid they felt because they weren't picking up what their peers were. We placed them in an environment where they are now being fully supported. They have regained their confidence and have been taught to be their own advocates for themselves and their learning needs. This is the difference that a child can have in a school that is appropriate for them. Whether it be a specialized school for learning differences for a Dyslexic, a smaller school for an ADHD child that is easily distracted or even just a school that supports the parents and family values. There's a Documentary by American Public Media called Sold A Story. It will tell you why there are millions of children who can't read in the US. I urge you ALL to listen to it: <https://features.apmreports.org/sold-a-story/>

I bet some of you reading or listening to this now are Dyslexic, know someone who is or are questioning whether you or someone you know could be. If I told you that I knew the answer to help them, would you put your trust in that and do what's needed? Would you be willing to do what's right for a child you've never met? A child with the potential to perhaps one day change the world? Children to the likes of Albert Einstein, Steven Spielberg, Muhammad Ali, Agatha Christie, Andy Warhol and John Lennon?

Well, I do have the answer and the answer lies in giving all children what they need to succeed and that isn't the same thing for every child, and it surely doesn't mean the same building. The one size fits all a public school system and building is not what all children need. Parents who can't afford a private school or a school for their child with a learning difference are forced to stay in an inappropriate environment at the expense of the child and ultimately the family with no options. This bill opens those options. This bill simply redirects the funds that are already there. This bill is what Equity is all about and this bill gives all students the access to gain equal opportunities in education and learning. **I beg of you ALL to vote FAVORABLE with Amendments** to Establishing the Education Savings Account program in our state of Maryland and to including children who have been publicly funded in a private school within the past year for not less than 100 days during the immediately preceding fiscal year that the bill as written leaves out.

Warmly,
Tara and Matthew Thompson
Catonsville, MD 21228
Baltimore County

Bill As Written:

- The bill as written DOES NOT **include students who have been publicly funded** by the public school system (as a result of an IEP agreement, mediation agreement or due process agreement) and placed in a private school. These students do not meet the requirement of an "eligible" students as the bill is written.
 - (C) (1) **“ELIGIBLE STUDENT” MEANS A STUDENT WHO:**
 - (I) IS ELIGIBLE TO ENROLL IN A PUBLIC SCHOOL IN THE STATE; 10 AND 11
 - (II) ATTENDED A PUBLIC SCHOOL, CHARTER SCHOOL, OR HOME 12 SCHOOL PROGRAM IN THE STATE FOR NOT LESS THAN 100 DAYS DURING THE 13 IMMEDIATELY PRECEDING FISCAL YEAR.
 - (2) **“ELIGIBLE STUDENT” INCLUDES A STUDENT OF AN ACTIVE-DUTY MILITARY MEMBER STATIONED IN THE STATE, REGARDLESS OF THE ATTENDANCE REQUIREMENTS UNDER PARAGRAPH (1) OF THIS SUBSECTION.**

Amendment REQUESTED: (please include highlighted area to the amendment)

- (C) (1) **“ELIGIBLE STUDENT” MEANS A STUDENT WHO:**

- (I) IS ELIGIBLE TO ENROLL IN A PUBLIC SCHOOL IN THE STATE; 10 AND 11
- (II) ATTENDED A PUBLIC SCHOOL, CHARTER SCHOOL, OR HOME 12 SCHOOL PROGRAM IN THE STATE FOR NOT LESS THAN 100 DAYS DURING THE 13 IMMEDIATELY PRECEDING FISCAL YEAR.
- HAS BEEN PUBLICLY FUNDED IN A PRIVATE SCHOOL WITHIN THE PAST YEAR FOR NOT LESS THAN 100 DAYS DURING THE IMMEDIATELY PRECEDING FISCAL YEAR.
- **(2) “ELIGIBLE STUDENT” INCLUDES** A STUDENT OF AN ACTIVE DUTY MILITARY MEMBER STATIONED IN THE STATE, REGARDLESS OF THE ATTENDANCE REQUIREMENTS UNDER PARAGRAPH (1) OF THIS SUBSECTION.