

SB681 Testimony.pdf

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Position: FAV

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Finance Committee

Chair, Executive Nominations Committee

Spending Affordability Committee

Joint Committee on Gaming Oversight

Joint Committee on Management of
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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

February 28, 2023

SB 681

Education – Virtual Schools – Access to Extracurricular Activities and Athletics

Good Afternoon Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan and Member of the Committee;

I appreciate the opportunity to bring you SB 681, Virtual Schools – Access to Extracurricular Activities and Athletics. Parents have chosen Virtual Schools for their children for many reasons, illness, safety, convenience to name just a few. Currently these students have access to some virtual clubs during the day but do not have access to sports programs.

SB681 provides the opportunity for these students to have the complete High School experience. They can participate in the academic program virtually and they will be able participate in extracurricular activities at the public school the student would otherwise be required to attend.

I respectfully request a favorable report on SB 681.

SB0681 Favorable.pdf

Uploaded by: Stephanie Doersam

Position: FAV

February 28, 2023

Senate Bill 681

Support

There is a great deal of research demonstrating that participation in extracurricular activities and athletics, especially at the high school level leads to greater student success. For example, the US Dept of Education states that extracurricular activities improve social skills as well as school success. Further, college applications and scholarships have students list not only their GPAs and test scores but also their participation outside the classroom as they seek “well rounded students.” Unfortunately, Maryland law currently precludes high school students who are participating in virtual academies from attending sports at their boundary schools. While this law was certainly put in place to keep students from boundary hopping to be on the “best” teams, there is a need for it to evolve with the advent of virtual academies.

During the 2021-2022 school year, there were 12,472 Maryland students participating in virtual academies throughout all but two counties representing over 1% of the student population. While these families may have varied reasons for choosing a virtual academy, the absence of extracurricular opportunities may have been a deterrent for participation for students who may have thrived in a virtual environment academically.

My son, Xander, a senior at North County High School is one such student. On October 11, 2018, Xander awoke with a headache that has never gone away. Something about the school buildings makes it worse. It was worse while he attended Lindale middle school, better during COVID virtual learning and is worse every day he is at North County High School. We have tried blue blocker glasses, fluorescent light blocker glasses, etc. to no avail. We considered the virtual academy offered by AACPS but, Xander also likes to play tennis and participating with the drama club as part of their tech support and these were not an option for students in the virtual academies. As such he goes to school each day knowing his headache will worsen at times dealing with debilitating vision loss and confusion which makes learning more difficult as well as painful. While this change in law will not affect my son as he graduates this year, our hope is that students like Xander will have the opportunity he did not have.

There are many students who have medical, social or psychological reasons that make a virtual academy a good choice for their learning who may also want to participate in sports opportunities. The intent of this bill, which has no fiscal impact, is to simply allow the students who are enrolled in virtual academies to be able to participate in the extracurricular and athletic opportunities at their boundary schools. Maryland law must continue to evolve as technology advances and as alternate learning modes are available.

Thank you,

Dr. Stephanie Doersam, PT, DPT, M.Ed.

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<https://nces.ed.gov/pubs95/web/95741.asp#:~:text=Extracurricular%20activities%20provide%20a%20channel,of%20a%20well%2Drounded%20education.>

<https://www.aspenprojectplay.org/youth-sports/facts>

SB 681_ Education – Virtual Schools – Access to Ex

Uploaded by: Alexa Thomas

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PSSAM
Public School Superintendents' Association
OF MARYLAND

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BILL: SB 681

TITLE: Education – Virtual Schools – Access to Extracurricular Activities and Athletics

DATE: March 1, 2023

POSITION: Support with Amendments

COMMITTEE: Education, Energy, and the Environment

CONTACT: Mary Pat Fannon, Executive Director, PSSAM

The Public School Superintendents' Association of Maryland (PSSAM), on behalf of all twenty-four public school superintendents, **supports with one amendment**, Senate Bill 681.

This bill requires a virtual school to provide each enrolled student with access to (1) extracurricular activities at the public school the student would otherwise be required to attend and (2) notwithstanding any other law or regulation, and subject to a participation agreement between the public school and the parent of the student, participation in organized athletics and on athletic teams at the public school the student would otherwise be required to attend. A virtual school must also provide to parents of enrolled students informational materials on the access to extracurricular activities and athletic participation provided for under the bill.

The COVID-19 pandemic has created many challenges in the delivery of public education. However, it has highlighted the value and potential of virtual learning. There is no doubt that virtual learning will continue as an important component of public education, well past the end of this pandemic. As the state's top educators, superintendents embrace this new mode of learning and feel it is a welcome supplement to the high-quality education already provided in Maryland schools.

PSSAM supports the intention to offer equal access to virtual students to all services at a brick and mortar schools. However, provisions requiring virtual schools to offer enrolled students access to extracurriculars, wrap-around services, food and nutrition services, and equivalent health care services is important but may be too restrictive. We seek language that allows that

these may be provided by the entire LEA and not just at the student's "home school," and in accordance with local board policies and procedures, and offered to the "extent practicable." While many of our programs for the last two years have provided many of these amenities, this is not happening 100% across all LEAs. Some have focused on the food and wrap-around services, while others have limited participation in sports and extracurriculars for various reasons including operational difficulties with transportation.

It is important to remember that virtual schools are a choice for families and expectations should be clear that this is a different opportunity compared to traditional in-person schools with some trade-offs. As such, local boards and superintendents should have the right to set the criteria for participation in a virtual program.

For these reasons, PSSAM **supports Senate Bill 681 with amendments discussed above.**