

My name is Alexandria McKone and I am a mother of four in Anne Arundel County. I ask you to reject SB0829, as it has adverse consequences for the families it was meant to aid. My children were wonderful students before technology took the place of teachers in the classroom. Now, they come home from school with bloodshot eyes, unable to focus on simple tasks, and unable to write legibly or spell. Technology has not only failed them, but has caused them harm. Studies have proven that excessive screen time is linked to lower scores in cognitive assessments, higher impulsivity, obesity, depressive symptoms, low self-esteem, behavioral issues, and damage to the retina. Yet, this bill is pushing to further embed screen time without limitation in education.

On a normal inclement weather day, older children would stay home and play; something that would not require constant supervision. However, SB0829 puts technology into their hands on these days, requiring constant supervision both to keep the children from accessing inappropriate content as well as to keep them on task. Current measures in our schools allow access to video games, YouTube videos, and even pornography. While well-intended, school districts' content monitoring is ineffective at best. The result of a virtual instruction day is thereby unsupervised access to inappropriate content, which most parents would like to prevent. Alternatively, older children could consciously choose not to engage in the lesson, resulting in an unlawful absence.

For younger children unable to stay home, parents would drop them off with someone in their support system or at a daycare center for an inclement weather day. However, SB0829 hinders these options. Let us explore how these two scenarios play out in families with young children if SB0829 passes:

I, along with most parents, struggle with these devices. Surely my neighbors and friends (my support system), all of whom have no experience with Brightspace, will encounter difficulty getting my children online, if they even have internet. If my neighbors and friends cannot get my children online, I face an unlawful absence. As a result, my support system is no longer an option.

The next option is to drop the children off at a daycare center. If one teacher cannot prevent their class from playing video games in the classroom, how will a daycare center handle all of the children, frequently requiring individual assistance on their devices, while still caring for the infants and toddlers? Daycare providers are not familiar with the inappropriate content, frequently disguised as learning games. As a result, the children will have unrestricted access to inappropriate content and will not have the individualized support they need to engage in virtual instruction. Further, they may play games instead of accessing the lesson, resulting in an unlawful absence.

This bill essentially requires parents to take the day off to stand over their children's shoulders and ensure they are staying on task. What happens to the children of teachers, who are also required to attend virtual instruction days, but have a parent who is preoccupied? What happens to the children who do not have power or internet at home, which is especially likely in inclement weather? What happens to the families who cannot afford to have an adult stay home to supervise, and their child decides not to attend?

Lastly, the bill requires that virtual instruction days do not include graded material. This implies that the virtual instruction days will be less than educational. What is the point of requiring children to attend virtual instruction days, when we know they will be a joke?

Please do not pass this bill. The consequences are detrimental to working parents, including the teachers themselves, while the gains are negligible.