

Good Afternoon Chairman Atterbeary, and members of the Committee. Thank you for allowing me an opportunity to provide testimony related to House Bill 985.

My name is Jennifer Clarke and I am a State Policy Support Specialist for Pearson Virtual Schools (PVS), working with states in the northeast, many of which have established full-time statewide virtual schools. We support the establishment of a fully online opportunity for Maryland's students. PVS has more than 20 years of experience serving students in grades K-12 in an online setting. We currently support 46 fully online schools in 31 states. In fact, Pearson's online curriculum is used in many traditional and charter schools in Maryland right now.

Online educational opportunities are not for every student, but for some students they provide a much-needed alternative. Having worked in online education for more than 15 years, I have personally met students who were struggling academically or were being bullied in their traditional school environment. I have worked with students who were medically fragile, were pregnant or were a necessary income provider in their household. I've worked with other students who were high-achievers and looking for any opportunity available to them to take AP courses, or travel with a highly competitive sports program.

During the pandemic, families got a taste of the flexibility of online education. They learned what students attending virtual schools in neighboring states have known for years – high quality online options can provide flexibility and individualization too and are distinguished from emergency remote learning some students experienced

It is time for Maryland's students to have the same educational opportunities that students in Pennsylvania, Virginia, Rhode Island, Maine, South Carolina, Georgia and many other states have had for years. HB 985 will provide that. Pearson Virtual Schools' headquarters are in Maryland. We want to serve the students of our home state and look forward to working with you to adopt legislation that will afford us that opportunity.

Thank you for giving me this opportunity.