



# **TESTIMONY PACKAGE 'C'**

**Community Members**

2023

# MARYLAND STUDENT COALITION

## PACKAGE 'C'

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1	Arpit Kesharwani	Student (Howard County)
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5	Maggie Rathgeb	Student - <i>Student Member of the Calvert County Board of Education</i>
6	Abisola Ayoola	Student - <i>Student Member of the Howard County Board of Education</i>

\*Please Note: Additional Organizations have supported this initiative, but did not submit written testimony in time to be filed with this package. Please inquire for further information by contacting: [ckodsi@outlook.com](mailto:ckodsi@outlook.com)

### Collected Testimony Package

February 22, 2023

<b>TO:</b>	Members of the Ways and Means Committee; Maryland House of Delegates
<b>FROM:</b>	Arpit Kesharwani, <a href="mailto:arpit.harsit01@gmail.com">arpit.harsit01@gmail.com</a> , 4107776246 4937 Lee Farm Court, Ellicott City, Maryland 21043
<b>RE:</b>	House Bill 568: Education - Student-Organized Peaceful Demonstrations - Student Discipline and Policy
<b>POSITION:</b>	<b>In Favor</b>

Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins, and Members of the Committee, I am writing as a student from Howard County, in favor of House Bill 568. My name is Arpit Kesarwani, I am a sophomore at Howard High School in Ellicott City, Maryland.

Article 40 of the Constitution of the state of Maryland states “every citizen in the State ought to be able to speak, write, and publish...” The right to protest and speak against injustice is a right given by the constitution. Throughout many schools in Maryland, this freedom is being oppressed. This bill allows universal rights for students to demonstrate on school grounds without the fear of consequences. Elevates students' voices and recognizes the importance of peaceful demonstration. Serves an essential educational experience; civic responsibility.

My school, Howard High School, has had a few protests in the last few years. In 2022, students, like me, at my school participated in a protest against the state of Florida’s Parental Rights in Education Act which discriminated against LGBTQIA+ students. The walkout was peaceful and many students and faculty members participated. My high school marked all students present who participated in the walkout. I talked to my friends who attend schools in counties like Carroll and Anne Arundel, they told me they were not permitted to protest against the Parental Rights in Education Act. Their school had threatened to suspend all students who took part in any sort of protest. This is unfair to students. Implementing HB 568 will guarantee all students the right to protest no matter if they are from Howard County or Anne Arundel County.

For the reasons stated above, I urge the committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 568.

February 22, 2023

<b>TO:</b>	Members of the Ways and Means Committee; Maryland House of Delegates
<b>FROM:</b>	Madison Watts, <a href="mailto:maddiecassiewatts7@gmail.com">maddiecassiewatts7@gmail.com</a> , (309)429-4066, 3904 Arbor Crest Way, Rockville Maryland
<b>RE:</b>	House Bill 568: Education - Student-Organized Peaceful Demonstrations - Student Discipline and Policy
<b>POSITION:</b>	<b>In Favor</b>

My name is Madison Watts and I am a sophomore attending Rockville High School in Montgomery County. I have been involved in student advocacy over the course of my high school career and have had the honor of representing students, drafting policies, working with other student leaders, and providing testimony to decision-makers. Some of my experience entails being a current intern for Lynne Harris, the MCPS At-Large Board of Education Member, the Environmental Education Director of Eco MoCo, a Senior Associate of the Maryland Student Coalition, and the current 2023-2024 Maryland Student Member of the Board of Education finalist. Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins, and Members of the Committee, I am writing as a student from Montgomery County, in favor of House Bill 568.

This bill is imperative for the furtherance of the student body as it encourages expression and is actively working to bring student voices and concerns to the forefront. Students deserve the opportunity to demonstrate in schools as this supports strong student voices. Student demonstrations are impactful and students should not have to be faced with consequences for expressing their views. As specified in this bill, students have an expectation to act on their best behavior and with personal integrity during demonstrations, ensuring they are being respectful and perceptive of students and staff in the area and the message they are relaying to the public. This significant bill allows universal rights for students to demonstrate on school grounds without fear of consequence. This bill not only expands student voices, but ultimately encourages students to see the worth in their voices and their passions. It is a very important educational experience that students can gain valuable information and takeaways from. Also, this promotes civic responsibility from an essential group of people who will be making decisions and will need to expand on their civic duty in the future. Students need vital, hands-on education to support them and supply them with resources. However, we cannot limit this to education in the classroom. Sometimes, the best and most memorable lessons are the lessons that students get to be personally involved in and it's the experiences. The passage and your support towards this bill would exponentially assist in this valuable educational experience.

As a student activist, I have had many experiences participating in student demonstrations. Although many of them have been out of school, I would love to see more civic engagement and peaceful demonstrations throughout my school. Coming from Rockville High School, a smaller and less represented school in my county, many students will never have the opportunity to experience, let alone be a part of a student demonstration. However, with the passing of this bill, and your support, students will have this opportunity. Last December, I was a part of civil disobedience, protesting

outside of the Montgomery County Council building for increased funding for a social housing program. In another instance, I was in D.C. protesting for gun control and speaking about the recent school shooting concerns. These experiences have largely shaped me as a person and sparked a passion in me to get involved to work to combat issues that indirectly and directly impact student life. I felt empowered being able to create action and be part of a collective effort to directly argue against problems I saw. With this bill, students all over the nation will have this opportunity and empowerment. As a nation that prides itself on representation, equity, and freedom of speech, we must be extending the opportunity to speak and use our voices as students.

For the reasons stated above, I urge the committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 568.

February 22, 2023

<b>TO:</b>	Members of the Ways and Means Committee; Maryland House of Delegates
<b>FROM:</b>	Chloe Chang, Montgomery County chloechang630@gmail.com
<b>RE:</b>	House Bill 568: Education - Student-Organized Peaceful Demonstrations - Student Discipline and Policy
<b>POSITION:</b>	<b>In Favor</b>

Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins and honorable members of the Ways and Means committee, my name is Chloe Chang and I am a freshman at Poolesville High School and a senior associate at the Maryland Student Coalition. Today, I am writing in favor of HB 568.

Youth activism is on the rise, students are fervently addressing social justice issues and demanding change. Maryland students and educators alike need this bill in order to allow students to freely assemble peacefully, and draw clear guidelines and parameters for youth demonstrations.

The Maryland Student Coalition strongly believes in students’ rights to exercise their First Amendment rights on school grounds. I have attended successful student demonstrations in the past, including a student walk-out at my middle school advocating for LGBTQ+ rights in light of prevalent homophobia and hate speech at the school. Through these experiences, I have witnessed firsthand how youth demonstrations can strengthen student voices and community.

In my high school classes, I listen to discussions between my peers and teachers about the hassle of planning and approving student protests. Students at my school Poolesville High School and all across my county of Montgomery County are passionate about advocacy and political issues and are extensively involved in student government. Though this gives me hope for the bright, educated future of our generation, it is equally disheartening to see students hold back from organizing demonstrations. It is difficult to enact demonstrations with unclear guidelines and legal parameters, along with the required pre-approval from multiple school administrators and teachers. The fear of being marked absent in class or other administrative consequences has also prevented multiple students around me from participating in peaceful assemblies.

For the reasons stated above, I urge the committee to issue a **favorable** report on HB 568. Thank you.

February 22, 2023

<b>TO:</b>	Members of the Ways and Means Committee; Maryland House of Delegates
<b>FROM:</b>	Shruti Vadlakonda <a href="mailto:Shruti.Vadlakonda@mdstudentcouncils.org">Shruti.Vadlakonda@mdstudentcouncils.org</a> 443-766-3851 5851 Trotter Road, Clarksville MD, 20129.
<b>RE:</b>	House Bill 568: Education - Student-Organized Peaceful Demonstrations - Student Discipline and Policy
<b>POSITION:</b>	<b>In Favor</b>

Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins, and Members of the Committee, I am writing as a student from a Howard County Public School in Maryland, in favor of House Bill 568. I currently serve as the Treasurer for the Maryland Association of Student Councils (MASC) and am thankful for being able to share my written testimony.

This bill will allow students to voice their concerns in a peaceful, nonviolent manner without disrupting the proceedings at school. The bill will *directly* elevate the voices of students across the state of Maryland who deserve the right to freely express their opinions and thoughts in a comfortable environment without fear of repercussions. Furthermore, this provision would teach students to be more civically engaged in their community and the experience can impart valuable educational lessons to the future generation of leaders.

Personally, I have seen the ability of student demonstrations to bring together students in a school on important issues such as gun violence and racism. Through peaceful demonstrations, students were able to highlight the urgency of these issues and bring them to the attention of officials in charge of affecting change in our society.

For the reasons stated above, I urge the committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 568.

February 22, 2023

<b>TO:</b>	Members of the Ways and Means Committee; Maryland House of Delegates
<b>FROM:</b>	Maggie Rathgeb, smob@calvertnet.k12.md.us, 301-802-0257, 9345 Baker St Owings, MD 20736
<b>RE:</b>	House Bill 568: Education - Student-Organized Peaceful Demonstrations - Student Discipline and Policy
<b>POSITION:</b>	<b>In Favor</b>

Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins, and Members of the Committee, I am writing as the *Calvert County* Student Member of the Board, in favor of House Bill 568.

It is an unambiguous fact that students are the largest stakeholder and voice in every local education agency in the state of Maryland; their rights need to be protected. House Bill 568 does exactly this—allowing for universal rights of students to demonstrate on school grounds without fear of consequence. The role of students in our school system is not merely to be complaisant, but to be an advocate for themselves. This bill protects the rights for students to be outspoken in their advocacy. Protecting these rights is crucial to fostering a state that values all voices. It is crucial to raising young people who are action-oriented leaders. It is crucial in teaching students the importance of civic engagement. It sets an example of community engagement for the impressionable students of Maryland. It is the responsibility of our state to not only protect, but inspire this generation of young people. This bill does both.

Every high school student in Maryland who takes a United States government course learns about the history of peaceful demonstration in our country. How is it okay to teach our students the important role youth has played in these efforts without guaranteeing them the right to participate in the same thing? Students are constantly exposed to waves of information online about current student-led demonstrations across the country as well. It is imperative to not only allow, but encourage this type of action-oriented behavior they are witnessing. I want to be in a school where I feel comfortable putting the things I see and learn about everyday into action. I want to learn in a place where I am inspired by my peers' drive to be their own advocate. I want to interact in an environment where I know my rights as a student are completely protected. I am certain that House Bill 568 will guarantee these for me and all of my peers.

For the rights of students, the importance of youth civic engagement, and the support of student voice, I urge the committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 568.



February 22, 2023

<b>TO:</b>	Members of the Ways and Means Committee; Maryland House of Delegates
<b>FROM:</b>	Abisola Ayoola, <a href="mailto:abisolaworks@gmail.com">abisolaworks@gmail.com</a> , 3019175980, 10414 Faulkner Ridge Circle, Columbia MD, 21044
<b>RE:</b>	House Bill 568: Education - Student-Organized Peaceful Demonstrations - Student Discipline and Policy
<b>POSITION:</b>	<b>In Favor</b>

Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins, and Members of the Committee, I am writing as a student from Howard County in favor of House Bill 568.

As the current Student Member of the Howard County Board of Education, I've seen just how powerful it is for decision-makers to make student needs a priority. Now more than ever, students need to be assured that their rights are protected and valued, and we can accomplish this by advocating for House Bill 568. This bill reinforces the notion that student rights are protected in schools, specifically allowing for demonstrations on school grounds.

In my sixth grade year, I was an organizer for my school's March for Our Lives walkout, and it was an empowering experience to have the support of our teachers. In that very same year, I was enrolled in the independent research program and investigated how the first amendment rights translate to everyday life for high school students. As a part of this research, I interviewed several school board members, including the Student Member at the time, Anna Selbrede, since she wrote a Resolution uplifting students' right to assembly. Her work, as well as the advocacy from my peers, showed just how important it is for policy makers to support students in their self expression. Every student should be able to protest on school grounds without fear of repercussions. Supporting this bill elevates student voices and recognizes the importance of peaceful demonstrations.