



TESTIMONY PACKAGE 'A'

Coalition Leads

2023

MARYLAND STUDENT COALITION

PACKAGE 'A'

Contents:

Number	Name	Description
<i>1</i>	Christina Kodsi	Coalition Director (Student - Howard County);
<i>2</i>	Chikamara Obioha	Coalition Deputy Director (Student - Howard County) <i>Representative, Howard County Community Action Council</i>
<i>3</i>	Elani Bui	Coalition Associate Director (Student- Montgomery Country) <i>State Affairs Deputy, Montgomery County Regional SGA</i>
<i>4</i>	Hunter Craig	Coalition Director Emeritus (Former Student - Howard County) <i>Commissioner, Howard County MLK Jr. Holiday Commission.</i>

Collected Testimony Package

February 22, 2023

TO:	Members of the Ways and Means Committee; Maryland House of Delegates
FROM:	Christina Kodsi, Director - Maryland Student Coalition (443) 812-2959, ckodsi@outlook.com 7220 Preservation Ct, Fulton, Maryland 20759
RE:	House Bill 568: Education - Student-Organized Peaceful Demonstrations - Student Discipline and Policy
POSITION:	In Favor

Chair Atterbeary I am happy to be writing to you as one of your constituents. Vice Chair Wilkins and esteemed members of the committee, my name is Christina Kodsi and I am writing to you as Director of the Maryland Student Coalition in favor of House Bill 568 and as a senior within the Howard County Public School System.

History inherently supports House Bill 568. The importance of freedom of expression is illustrated to students beginning as early as elementary school.

From the civil rights movement to the suffrage movement to hallmark Supreme Court trials such as Tinker vs. Des Moines. Time and time again, students learn that one’s expression – one’s voice – is key to changing and advancing the world. In turn, students must be able to practice the same civic engagement they learn in class. The very lessons that educators bestow upon their students should be encouraged. House Bill 568 will protect exactly this. It will protect the vital student right to demonstrate without any additional administrative consequences.

If passed, this House Bill 568 will protect students in two ways – protection of expression and their physical safety. It will serve as a uniformed code, providing students and administrators alike with the platform to agree upon conditions for a peaceful demonstration. With the implementation of this bill, both groups will be provided ample time to mutually discuss logistics and understand each other’s roles and expectations within an agreed-upon neutral framework. In other words, both students' voices AND safety will be protected. Currently, across the state, different jurisdictions have different ways and rules surrounding student demonstrations. House Bill 568 will standardize the rules around peaceful student expression while allowing – within certain boundaries – for customization across locales. If there are no guidelines for school systems to adhere to, students may continue to be stripped of their freedom of speech without consequence. In its purest form, House Bill 568 is instrumental for both the likes of local jurisdictions and the students they must protect.

In my own experience as an advocate, I, like many students across the state of Maryland, have witnessed the tangible impact of student demonstrations. Beginning in middle school, a student

group organized a peaceful demonstration to support the battle against gun violence following the Stoneman Douglass shooting. The event was not an excuse for students to skip class – as a body, we students gathered to share meaningful words. Similar events followed into high school. With each and every student demonstration, it became overwhelmingly evident to me that students have a voice that *must* be heard. Members of the committee, *you* can provide the environment that fosters growth of this voice. While my own experiences in student advocacy support this idea, I understand not all students in Maryland are given this same treatment.

Now, we are students. Soon, we will be leaders. Giving today’s students the opportunity to practice leadership through peaceful expressions of their voice allows students to grow into the responsible civic leaders of the future.

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

Thank you.

February 22, 2023

TO:	Members of the Ways and Means Committee; Maryland House of Delegates
FROM:	Chikamara Obioha, chikamaraobioha@gmail.com, (410) 5991815 5209 Spurr Terrace, Ellicott City, MD, 20143
RE:	House Bill 568: Education - Student-Organized Peaceful Demonstrations - Student Discipline and Policy
POSITION:	In Favor

Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins, and Members of the Committee, I am writing as a current junior attending Howard High School, the Deputy Director of the Maryland Student Coalition and current student representative on the Howard County Community Action Council from Howard County, in favor of House Bill 568.

The implementation of this bill will allow students to demonstrate their constitutional rights while attending an educational institution. Giving students back their voices from the walls inside of a school building helps students to leave their mark on the community. Students stand up for what they believe in every way that they can, and the passage of this bill provides a safe avenue for the expression of opinion. Allows universal rights for students to demonstrate on school grounds without fear of consequence. Elevates student voices and recognizes the importance of peaceful demonstration. Serves an important educational experience; civic responsibility.

In 2022, my high school, Howard High School, led a student-organized walkout against the State of Florida's Parental Rights in Education Act that openly and harmful discriminated against and targeted LGBTQIA+ students. The organized walkout was peaceful, respectful, and informative. It educated students on the bill, gave students the opportunity to share their opinions in a safe space, and acknowledged the wrongdoings of that bill. Let all schools in Maryland be able to hold these walkouts. Let all schools in Maryland support driven students who want to make a change in their community. Let all schools in Maryland respect and acknowledge the rights of students to demonstrate on school grounds without the fear of suspension, detention, or any other form of punishment.

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

February 22, 2023

TO:	Members of the Ways and Means Committee; Maryland House of Delegates
FROM:	Elani Bui, elanibui@gmail.com
RE:	House Bill 568: Education - Student-Organized Peaceful Demonstrations Student Discipline and Policy
POSITION:	In Favor

Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins and esteemed Members of the House Ways & Means Committee. My name is Elani Bui and I am writing as a life-long student from Montgomery in favor of House Bill 568.

Students are increasingly interested in politics and participating in social events. A Civic Education article notes that "increasing students' political interest has been a longstanding goal of civic education. One way to trigger students' interests in political issues is by engaging them first in an attention grabbing activity." Demonstrating on school grounds should be included as a school-approved activity to teach students about current events and provide an educational experience about civic responsibility. By allowing students to demonstrate their opinions without fear of consequence, schools will foster logical, knowledgeable voters. A survey acknowledges how the future generation of voters "shows unprecedented levels of interest in both political engagement and student activism, underscoring the youth vote's potential to reshape the electoral landscape." When allowing students to demonstrate on school grounds, schools train future generations to be active in society. Of course, regulations must be put in place, but politics should be taught early to prevent ignorant voters. Students are the stakeholders in the future of education and society in general. It's important to help implement ways to make world studies and history classes interactive to give us students a more profound understanding of controversial topics and the political workings.

Concerning protests, sources will call the Black Lives Matter protests somewhat chaotic. Although the original intent was to demonstrate peacefully, a human's right, multiple demonstrations ended in violence and vandalism. If schools were to allow peaceful protests on school grounds, it elevates student voice, leadership ability, and recognizes the importance of peaceful demonstration. Students who grow up peacefully demonstrating and see the positive

effects will be less likely to resort to violent measures. Psychological research finds that "where people don't believe their appeals to authorities will be heard, protesters may be more likely to adopt violent methods of protest." If schools accommodate students' right to demonstrate without fear of consequences, students will grow up with the belief that their voice matters, and that authorities will notice their problems. This can eliminate violent measures during demonstrations in the future.

Through my own experiences, I find the ability to hold demonstrations a productive way to create change and an insightful learning experience. In 5th grade, my elementary school would have Co-ed soccer on Fridays. There weren't that many participants during girl soccer, so Co-ed soccer was our chance to play more competitively. Except, the boys who played wouldn't pass the ball to any of us girls. In fact, they hardly acknowledged us as teammates. We would be picked last, and the games usually turned into boys against girls teams. When one of my friends brought the issue up to a teacher, the teacher said, "Maybe if you ran fast and played better, you could compare to the boys." Fueled by this comment, she hosted a protest to instigate change. Almost everybody in 5th grade participated in it. The protest didn't do anybody any harm; it was mainly a group of students marching around with signs and calling for change. This experience with demonstration on school grounds wasn't harmful to anybody. Eventually, other teachers, who were equally annoyed as us students, resolved the issue and used the experiences as a lesson about gender equality. That's what these demonstrations should be used as: an interactive lesson.

That is why allowing students to demonstrate on school grounds without negative consequences will prove beneficial. For the reasons stated above, I urge the committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 568.

February 22, 2023

TO:	Members of the Ways and Means Committee; Maryland House of Delegates
FROM:	Hunter P. Craig, huntercraig71108@gmail.com
RE:	House Bill 568: Education - Student-Organized Peaceful Demonstrations Student Discipline and Policy
POSITION:	In Favor

Dear Chair Atterbeary, Vice Wilkins and esteemed Members of the House Ways & Means Committee. My name is Hunter Craig and I write today as a proud K-12 product of the Maryland public school system in support of House Bill 568.

“It can hardly be argued that either students or teachers shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate.” This argument made by Supreme Court Justice Abe Fortas during the Tinker v. Des Moines trial illuminates the legal right that students have to demonstrate on school grounds. The 1969 ruling made clear that students' first amendment constitutional rights shall not be muted upon stepping foot into a public institution that they're legally required to attend. House Bill 568 will serve to protect such universal rights for students without the fear of additional consequences. This legislation will also elevate student voice and recognize the importance of peaceful demonstration. Furthermore, this bill will offer an unintentional but wholly desired educational experience; civic engagement.

Unfortunately, many school systems in the state of Maryland either directly or indirectly fail to recognize this Supreme Court precedent. Some students are subject to penalties ranging from detention to long term suspension if they carry out a demonstration on school grounds. In 2018, a group of Maryland students pleaded to their county's Board of Education to allow them to organize and participate in nationwide protests. Even though that county had a policy in their rule books allowing students to participate in demonstrations, its vagueness allowed the Board to block the student's request. Like this case, the majority of school systems in the state do not outline clear and consistent standards for which students shall have the ability to peacefully assemble. This legislation provides the necessary, uniformed code that permits mutually agreed upon conditions between students and administration when it comes to organizing a student demonstration. It also respects local autonomy by directing school systems to develop their own policy. This will ensure

that it fits the respective school systems needs and applies equal implementation to all students across the district. If we continue going by the status quo, it will leave open the opportunity for schools and local jurisdictions to unjustly restrict free speech.

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