

I am writing to urge you to vote for SB 311, Teacher Pay Parity Act. After a ten year career in medical research, including four years at the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, Department of Developmental Genetics, I left research to raise my family and became a teacher. I spent my first ten years as a high school science special education teacher at Perry Hall High School in Baltimore County. Special education became a passion because I saw the educational struggles of my nephew who has ADD and other learning disabilities. I realized that special education students are intelligent, capable students who can learn if given teachers with the proper training and the right learning environment.

After ten years I was overwhelmed by the relentless demands of trying to serve my students with insufficient resources in an environment that didn't meet their needs. I saw their daily struggles and frustrations. Unfortunately, too many internalized their learning struggles and adopted the attitude of 'I'm stupid and a failure'. I used to tell my husband that I spent the entire day putting band-aids on gunshot wounds in addition to trying to teach a curriculum.

When the opportunity came to take my skills and experience to a nonpublic/special education placement school, I leapt at the opportunity. This is my fourth year as a high school special educator at Baltimore Lab School. In spite of serving the most challenging public school students, I had to take a 25% pay cut when I left Baltimore County Public Schools. Financially it was a blow. I couldn't have done it if I didn't have a husband who worked in computer science and made a salary commensurate with his education and experience. I have a bachelor's degree in biology, 2 Master level degrees (Applied Molecular Biology and MAT), 10 years of research lab experience, 3 years of college adjunct teaching, 10 years of public school teaching and 4 years of nonpublic/special education placement school teaching and I make less money than some new college graduates. If I had stayed in the public school system I would be making significantly more money.

Everyday I know I am making a difference in the lives of my students, but it is hard work. Each student has individual educational needs. Due to my years of experience I have an extensive understanding of the content and various strategies to deliver that content. That allows me to constantly pivot and modify my lessons as needed. That is the kind of ability that can't be taught and that only comes with experience. I have seen many talented,experienced teachers make the tough decision to leave a nonpublic/special education placement school for a public school because they need more money. Not a single one wanted to leave, but they had to face the reality of their family's financial situation. The loss of experienced teachers is a blow to any school, but it hits special education students particularly hard. Although new teachers bring much energy and enthusiasm to the classroom, their lack of experience prevents them from delivering the same quality of instruction as a teacher with more classroom experience.

I know these schools make a difference and your support of this bill will save money in the long run. Students who leave our school have the education, confidence and real life skills to succeed in the world. They will make a positive contribution to society instead of relying on government aid. We recently had an alumni event that was attended by approximately 30 former students. Every student was gainfully employed or in a four year or two year college. I guarantee if you took a sample of 30 self-contained special education students from a public school you would not see the same results.

By voting for this bill you will allow nonpublic/special education placement schools to retain their qualified and experienced teachers and attract experienced public school teachers. nonpublic/special education placement schools serve a vital role in preparing students with learning differences for real world success. Please feel free to visit Baltimore Lab School at any time to see our programs and students for yourself. Our website also offers a glimpse of our students and learning programs. [Baltimore Lab School](http://www.baltimorelabschool.org)

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