

To: Chair Brian Feldman  
Energy, Education, and the Environment Committee  
2 West Miller Senate Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

Subject: Open-Source Phonics Matching Grant Program Act (HB 475)

Position: Favorable

Dear Chair Feldman:

I am Katie Spurlock, an advocate and the founder of Open Source Phonics.

Like other reading advocates in Maryland, I am thrilled to see the State Board's resolution on the Science of Reading. It focuses on the key components of getting reading right. One of those components is family and community engagement, and HB 475 will help with that.

As background, in the balanced literacy years, parents were misinformed about phonics. Even those of us with struggling readers were told that children will pick up phonics implicitly when exposed to print. Community engagement sessions ARE now needed to correct this and to explain what explicit instruction in phonics is all about. But a description won't be enough. Families need access to tools so that they can see, understand, and practice phonics at home if they wish.

With the Science of Reading shift, more Maryland kids should be reading by 3<sup>rd</sup> grade soon, but we know that all kids are different. Just as some kids need more practice before mastering the multiplication facts, some kids need more practice with phonics before reading fluently. The cost of commercial intervention materials—often upwards of \$200 a set—is a barrier for getting that practice. Parents who can afford to buy their own materials or hire tutors may do so. But parents without means are left out. This is inequitable and will hamper our progress.

HB 475 will attract nonprofits to serve this need. New materials can target particular needs such as the needs of multilingual learners. Open license tools are the most cost effective of doing this because they can be adapted and updated at minimal cost. Phonics tools are simply too important to be scarce.

I urge the committee for a favorable report.

Sincerely,

Katie Spurlock