

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

Re: Support for HB 475

The Montgomery County Council of PTAs (MCCPTA) urges you to support the Open-Source Phonics Matching Grant Program Act HB 475. MCCPTA provides guidance, training, and information to the school PTAs throughout Montgomery County and is affiliated with the Free State PTA and National PTA.

My name is Catherine Stocker and I am the Vice President of Education for the Montgomery County Council of PTAs (MCCPTA). MCCPTA represents 50,000 members over 194 local school PT(S)A chapters across Montgomery County. One of our values at MCCPTA is to coordinate advocacy on issues of common concern and so we write in support of HB-475: the Open-Source Phonics Matching Grant Program Act.

As a long-time PTA leader, I have had the privilege over the past seventeen years to speak with hundreds of students, parents, guardians and teachers. I have heard both about their concerns and fears and their hopes and goals. One of the most haunting conversations I have ever had was with a smart, seasoned, highly-respected and beloved elementary school principal in Montgomery County. She looked at me with such sadness and said, “Everything we learned about reading twenty years ago was wrong. We’ve been doing it wrong. We’ve been doing it wrong and it is the kids who have suffered.”

We now know that failure for years to implement science of reading instruction has resulted in lower literacy rates, lower scores and fewer opportunities for all kids, especially for those in our special populations. Already declining literacy rates were drastically exacerbated by pandemic-era learning loss and tragically, we saw learning gaps explode. Years of painstaking work by education leaders, volunteers and advocates to close achievement gaps were undone.

I applaud the work and persistence of our excellent MCPS educators and experts like Dr. Katie Spurlock who for years have advocated for a science-based pedagogy of reading. Changes in early-age reading curriculum in Montgomery County Public Schools have already shown progress. We must now continue to support this effort and build momentum. With new resolve, cooperation—and most importantly—the right phonics-backed tools, private, public and non-profit institutions working together can help kids learn and love to read. Improving literacy rates is fundamental to mastery in every course and every subject. ***Teachers will tell you that kids who love to read are kids who love to learn.***

PTAs have been and will continue to be strong partners with our school administrators and teachers. PTAs sponsor family reading nights and support efforts to provide enrichment materials to families who cannot otherwise afford supplementary commercially-produced materials or private tutoring. One of my favorite events to organize as a PTA president was the

community reading night. We were fortunate that we had some limited funds to pay for reading materials at these events. A matching grant would have allowed us to include more families and provide them with more tools. Because HB-475 stipulates that any materials funded **must be** approved by MDSE and must be open-source phonics materials, we can be assured that our investments are cost-conscious and backed by science. The matching grants that would be made available through HB-475 would allow PTAs and other organizations to provide MDSE-vetted and approved literacy materials and I am confident that we would see local literacy efforts continue to grow and flourish. Access to grants through matching funds will help PTAs amplify and expand our work as we respond to the needs in our communities. Most importantly, we will have more tools to aggressively address the achievement gaps in our communities so that no child is left behind. Imagine family reading nights and literacy events across our schools: events where committed volunteers can work with educators to give families the tools they need to support their students at home. School PT(S)As could also work together with their schools to fund supplementary summer packets to support phonics and reading practice when kids are not in school.

Our mission at MCCPTA is: “to make every child’s potential a reality by engaging and empowering families and communities to advocate for all children.” We are committed to this common challenge of helping every child, and especially those who were disproportionately impacted by pandemic-necessitated school closures. Please help us help all kids learn to read and love to learn.

Thank you for your consideration,
Catherine Stocker, MCCPTA VP of Education
Evelyn Chung, MCCPTA Curriculum Committee Chair