

*Thank you, Chair Senator Feldman, Vice Chair Senator Kagan, and members of the Education, Energy, and Environment Committee for the opportunity to support Senate Bill 980.*

My name is Amber Matthew, founder of STAR Learning Lab, a STEM-based tutoring company. I was born and raised in Baltimore, Maryland. No matter where my studies or career have taken me, I have always returned home to Maryland. I am a Software Engineer working in Robotics Process Automation and I support various STEM-based programs by working with various organizations such as the STEM Center of Excellence, Baltimore Robotics Center, and Baltimore City Schools. Through these organizations I coordinate competitions/events/fundraisers and train Baltimore City School teachers and volunteers to Coach/lead Elementary, Middle, & High School Robotics teams in the areas of Computer Programming, Engineering Design Process, and Computational Thinking.

I am a product of a Baltimore-based STEM program, more specifically a product of Competitive Robotics. I am a 2012 graduate of Western High School and a proud RoboDove. Picture this, a quiet timid girl who was often mistaken for a mute or sat towards the back of the classroom to avoid detection for the fear of being called on by the teacher. Speaking in front of an audience like this would terrify her. That girl was me.

My freshman year of High School after encouragement from my mother I joined the Robotics Club. Through the four years of being on the team I became the team's Driver, Programmer, Builder, and progressed to Team Captain in which I was able to lead the team to a total of four World Championships. Because of my involvement in Robotics, I found a passion in programming which led me to pursue a degree in Software Engineering. Through college I faced the challenges of being fairly "new" to the tech world compared to students who were exposed to STEM at an earlier age and had knowledge beyond my four years of Robotics experiences, I often felt that I was catching up to my peers. However, I carried the experiences from my time in Competitive Robotics to serve as a starting foundation for me to propel forward. Where am I now? I have traveled near and far to work on projects for top Banks, Insurance companies and Government Agencies.

Not only did Robotics teach me the technical skills involved in designing, building and programming a robot, but it also taught me the soft skills in leadership, problem-solving, teamwork, critical thinking, and it helped me find my voice. How could this experience have been changed? Being involved in a program such as this at an earlier age could have put me at an edge that so many of my peers had because they were involved in these programs at an Elementary/Middle School level.