

VT4S- DRAFT WRITTEN TESTIMONY SB0883

March 5, 2024

Maryland Senate Education, Energy and the Environment Committee

2 West

Miller Senate Office Building

Annapolis, Maryland 21401

via electronic submission

Varsity Tutors For Schools Testimony on SB0883 - Education – Virtual Tutoring Services – Applicant Review

Position: Favorable

Dear Chair Feldman and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of Varsity Tutors for Schools, I am pleased to submit the following testimony in favor of SB0883, a bill that proposes common-sense procedural changes to increase the availability of virtual tutoring for Maryland youth while clarifying and increasing safety protections afforded to youth in a virtual tutoring environment. If enacted, SB0883 would greatly increase the availability of tutoring for youth and will facilitate the mission of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future.

Varsity Tutors For Schools currently works with hundreds of school districts across the country to provide live, video-based high-dosage tutoring solutions to thousands of youth. As the United States Department of Education has identified, high-dosage tutoring plays a critical role in addressing learning loss associated with the COVID pandemic, and allows schools to level the playing field for all youth by providing focused supports to the students who need it most in ways that work best for them. Harvard's Center for Education Policy Research has found that learning loss will become permanent if schools do not expand learning in 2024. Varsity Tutors For Schools offers a solution to this near term problem by offering access to a network of more than 40,000 tutors who speak multiple languages. All tutors on the Varsity Tutors platform undergo extensive background checks to protect students.

Maryland school districts have shown considerable interest in using virtual high-dosage tutoring as a key tool to achieve the performance goals identified in the Blueprint. However, ambiguity around the statutory and regulatory requirements regarding fingerprinting of virtual tutors has led to interpretations of existing law that significantly limit or eliminate the ability for virtual tutors to provide tutoring to the students in need. Currently, it is not clear whether state law makes counties or tutoring services responsible for conducting background checks on virtual tutors. Some counties believe that current statutes require a time-consuming, in-person process, which is onerous for all tutors, especially those who may not live in the vicinity of the schools they will

be serving (which is, of course, the advantage of virtual tutoring in the first place - to provide students with high-quality tutoring without geography presenting any barriers). Under current law, it is not clear whether virtual tutors must be fingerprinted, who is responsible for conducting fingerprinting, and what other requirements must be met for schools to offer virtual tutoring to their students.

SB0883 addresses these issues by proposing a limited number of clarifications that will improve the ability to offer tutoring without in any way posing an additional risk to student safety.

SB0883 provides that:

- a virtual tutor must be background checked as thoroughly as any other individual who works with children, whether in a school or a day care setting; and
- background checks for virtual tutoring service providers required under the Family Law meet similar requirements set forth in the Education Law; and
- The virtual tutoring service shall conduct the background checks required under Section 5-555 of the Family Law on behalf of all individuals providing services to minors.

Collectively, these provisions ensure that Maryland students receiving virtual tutoring services are given all the same protections as if tutoring were conducted in person. However, by making these clarifications, virtual tutoring services like Varsity Tutors for Schools have the authority to perform background checks in advance to ensure that there are enough tutors to meet the needs of Maryland schools.

Varsity Tutors for Schools believes that Senator King's bill will provide great benefits to Maryland's youth and we are proud to offer our support to SB0883.

Thank you,



Jason Botel
Head of Government Relations