

HB 475 Letter (1).pdf

Uploaded by: Ayanna Baccus

Position: FAV



March 26, 2024

To: State of Maryland Legislators
Re: HB475 Support

My name is Dr. Ayanna Baccus, and I am submitting a letter of support for HB475.

Last May, I received a phone call from a friend and parent of two teen boys in Baltimore County. She had recently realized that her oldest son had a reading problem and wanted to find a tutor or program that would meet his needs. Her son was struggling to complete assignments and pass his classes. He had read aloud a passage for an assignment to her, stumbling and mispronouncing words and unable to state the meaning. She said, in that moment, she froze, acknowledging that her beautiful and talented child had made it to high school without learning how to read well. She said that he had stopped reading aloud in elementary school and that no one ever said that he needed extra help and tutoring. She contacted me for resources while waiting for a response from his school. Unfortunately, I did not know of many tutors or programs that focused on high school students. I shared what I had and encouraged her to contact the school again.

I am a certified reading specialist and Associate Clinical Professor in the College of Education at the University of Maryland, College Park. Reading and literacy instruction and materials are my areas of expertise. Each year, I lead the university's summer reading clinic where we provide supplemental reading instruction to children in the local community and prepare teachers to become school-based reading specialists. I receive emails and phone calls like the one described above throughout the year – concerned Maryland parents asking for help and tutoring for children with reading difficulties. Every summer, I share a short list of alternative tutors and resources with families as the university's summer program only accommodates a small number of children from the College Park community. Unfortunately, most families are unable to access these alternative resources due to the cost and expense associated with services. Help comes at a price.

Subsequently, parents who can afford tutoring costs are often unsuccessful in finding help too. Services may not be available in their community, materials may be outdated and ineffective, tutors may have full rosters, and tutoring times may conflict with parent work schedules. Schools are doing the best they can to provide quality instruction, but they are often only able to provide intensive support to a limited number of children who have documented disabilities in reading. They want to partner with families and communities just as university-based reading programs do, but we all need access to high-quality instructional resources for parents that are free and widely

available. We know that telling parents of children with reading difficulties that their children just need time and need to read more is inaccurate and insufficient. The research is clear - children need explicit, systematic instruction in early literacy skills, phonics, comprehension and vocabulary, and other areas.

The Open-Source Phonics Matching Grant Program meets this need by providing needed materials and lessons to children and families regardless of age, location, schedules, and costs. This program is long overdue. I strongly support this legislation and urgently call on state lawmakers to fulfill promises made to voters and parents to address educational needs and services in the state of Maryland.

Thank you,

/s/ Ayanna Baccus

Ayanna Baccus, Ph.D.
Associate Clinical Professor

From MCCPTA, support for HB 475.pdf

Uploaded by: Catherine Stocker

Position: FAV

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

2024-03-25 Testimony in Support of HB475.pdf

Uploaded by: Erin Parker

Position: FAV

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

Re: Support for HB 475

My name is Erin Parker, and I am testifying in support of HB475.

I am the parent of a child with dyslexia and a founding member of the Howard County Chapter of Decoding Dyslexia, and we help parents encountering the same problems that I will describe.

When my son was diagnosed when he was 7, his school denied him eligibility for special education, leaving it entirely to me to figure out how to help him.

I was at a loss.

He struggled with phonemic and phonological awareness, which is the ability to recognize and manipulate the individual sounds and parts of spoken words.

He also struggled with letter/sound association, which is recognizing the relationship of the letters in the alphabet to the sounds they produce.

I learned about the science of reading.

The science of reading is an evidence-based instructional practice that emphasizes the importance of phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension in developing strong literacy skills.

What I was unable to find was free resources based on the science of reading that I could use to work with my child to teach him to read.

Instructional materials can be cost prohibitive for parents.

I was lucky and was able to find a tutor who had been trained in the science of reading and was able to afford tutoring, which cost \$160 for 2 hours a week.

Tutoring wasn't enough, and I eventually sent him to private school, which costs \$40,000 per year.

Most parents cannot afford tutoring or private school.

Parents generally lack an understanding of which programs are based on the science of reading when they try to select materials.

Having a grant that would be administered by the Maryland State Department of Education to create instructional materials that could be used by parents and tutors would give parents confidence that they can help their children.

MSDE would review the grant proposals to ensure that the materials being created would align with the science of reading so that parents know that what they are selecting would actually be beneficial.

Maryland ranks 40th among the United States in reading based on fourth-grade scores and 25th based on eighth-grade scores on the Natl Assessment for Educational Proficiency test (NAEP).

If we are going to fix these deficiencies, we need to adopt the science of reading across the board, with teachers, tutors, and parents all using materials that align to the science of reading.

HB475 will help create and promote those materials so that parents can help their own children.

HB475senate.pdf

Uploaded by: Katherine Spurlock

Position: FAV

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 3rd 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

Senate testimony, DDMD Support HB 475-2.pdf

Uploaded by: Laura Schultz

Position: FAV

DECODING DYSLEXIA MARYLAND



House Bill 475: Open Source Phonics Matching Grant Program Act

Senate Energy, Education, and the Environment Committee

Wednesday, March 26, 2024

SUPPORT

Written Testimony

On behalf of the Decoding Dyslexia Maryland, we extend our appreciation to Chairman Feldman and Committee members for the opportunity to submit these comments. Our members strongly support House Bill 475 and respectfully urge the committee to provide a favorable report.

We would also like to express our gratitude to Delegate Korman for his unwavering commitment to advocating for students with reading difficulties. This legislation addresses a critical need in our communities.

House Bill 475 aims to establish new avenues of support for caregivers as they navigate their child's journey learning to read. For the majority of students in Maryland, this journey is difficult because some school districts and schools use ineffective reading instruction; this contributes to the escalation of students needing reading interventions, tutoring, and special education.

Dyslexia, a neurobiological learning difference impacting reading and related academic skills, is highly prevalent and one of the largest student populations requiring special education. This is partly attributed to school districts' use of outdated reading instruction and materials. This bill provides a lifeline to caregivers to help their children or tutees learn to read.

HB 475 directly tackles these issues in the following ways:

1. **Provides families and caregivers with evidence-aligned resources:** Parents of struggling readers and students with dyslexia often seek guidance on how to help at



DECODING DYSLEXIA MARYLAND

home. House Bill 475 is an opportunity for caregivers to use evidence-aligned instructional materials, assessments, or reading practice books, free of charge.

Presently, there's a notable scarcity of accessible, free, at-home instructional materials for reading that can be adapted to meet each student's needs.

2. **Encourages growth of open-source initiatives:** This bill would grow open source initiatives and eliminate the cost barrier so tutors can more easily afford to work with students who need help learning to read.
3. **Empowers local communities:** Through funding open-source phonics endeavors, the legislation empowers local organizations to tailor resources to suit the specific needs of their communities. For instance, libraries could develop and disseminate customized materials tailored to their patrons' needs.

The Benefits:

- **Enhances reading proficiency:** Access to quality phonics materials equips struggling students with the tools to bolster their reading abilities, fostering confidence and academic achievement.
- **Empowers parents:** The bill affords parents access to complimentary resources, enabling them to actively engage in their children's educational journey and speak the same language as school personnel.
- **Alleviates financial strain:** Free, open-source materials alleviate the financial burden often associated with supporting struggling readers or dyslexic students at home.
- **Fosters community collaboration:** The legislation encourages collaboration among organizations, educators, and parents, fostering a more supportive learning network bridging the gap between home and school.

DECODING DYSLEXIA MARYLAND



In conclusion, we hope you will lend your support to House Bill 475. It represents a significant stride toward ensuring equitable access to resources for all children. Thank you for your time, and we eagerly anticipate a favorable committee report.

###

Decoding Dyslexia Maryland (DDMD) is an unincorporated, grassroots network of parents, students and educators. Founded in 2012 by Laura Schultz and Lisa Blottenberger, DDMD has grown to over 2,000 members with 14 regional and local chapters. Our mission is to ensure access to effective reading instruction and interventions for all children who have difficulty learning to read.

www.decodingdyslexiamd.org

www.facebook.com/DecodingDyslexiaMd

<https://twitter.com/dyslexiasomd>

HB 475-Delegate Marc Korman-FAV Updated.pdf

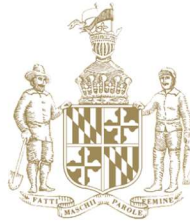
Uploaded by: Marc Korman

Position: FAV

MARC KORMAN
Legislative District 16
Montgomery County

Chair
Environment and Transportation
Committee

Rules and Executive
Nominations Committee



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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

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

Testimony of Delegate Marc Korman-Favorable

Thank you Mr. Chair, Madam Vice Chair and members of the Senate Education, Energy and the Environment Committee. I come before you today to discuss the Open-Source Phonics Matching Grant Program Act (HB 475). The legislation would create a state matching grant program, administered by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) to support organizations who provide free open-source phonics materials that adults can use to tutor children. We can use this as a tool to improve reading both in and out of the classroom. Support for phonics and providing supplemental instruction outside of the classroom is in line with MSDE's recently stated policy goals. At the January 11 State Board of Education meeting, the Board approved a resolution to implement "Science of Reading" programs, emphasizing the importance of phonological awareness and supplemental instruction.¹

The matching grant program would aid in the effort to improve Maryland's childhood literacy rates which have fallen over the last decade. In 2013, Maryland ranked 2nd nationally in fourth grade reading levels, but that ranking has fallen to 40th today.² Many students are not able to sound out and spell words in order to read fluently and write with ease.

Results from the Maryland Comprehensive Assessment Program (MCAP) reveal that in 2023 students in grades three through eighth have tested below 50% in English Language Arts (ELA) proficiency.³ A state investment in open-source phonics is one of several steps the state can take to boost childhood literacy rates.

The legislation will help address barriers to supplemental reading instruction that has been identified by MSDE as an area of need. In a 2021 report, MSDE addressed the problem of expensive copyrights for supplemental reading instruction outside the classroom. The report found that the prohibitive cost of supplemental literacy materials results in a lack of ELA proficiency within early childhood education.⁴ This not only impairs a student's ability to excel

¹ "Maryland State Board of Education Overview," Maryland State Department of Education, January 11, 2024, <https://marylandpublicschools.org/stateboard/pages/default.aspx>.

² Kristen Griffith, "Maryland Doubles down on Science of Reading with New Literacy Plan," The Baltimore Banner, January 24, 2024, <https://thebaltimorebanner.com/education/k-12-schools/maryland-science-of-reading-plan-RUS7JQ3LPND65B7UQG22F7UZLU/>.

³ Lawson, Sylvia. "Maryland State Department of Education Provides 2023 Maryland Comprehensive Assessment Program (MCAP) Statewide Results." Maryland State Department of Education provides 2023 Maryland Comprehensive Assessment Program (MCAP) statewide results, August 22, 2023. <https://news.maryland.gov/msde/msde-2023mcap-statewide-results/>.

⁴ "Aid to Education." Maryland State Department of Education, 2021. <https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/pubs/budgetfiscal/2023fy-budget-docs-operating-R00A02-MSDE-Aid-to-Education.pdf>.

within secondary education, but higher education as well. The MSDE report listed phonological awareness programs as part of a list of effective supplemental reading programs that are often inaccessible to Maryland families because their licensing is not openly accessible and expensive.

The Open-Source Phonics Matching Grant Act aims to solve this problem by providing matching grants to organizations that provide open-source phonics materials. Open-source phonics refers to material with either freely obtainable source code, license for modification or permission for free distribution. You will read about some of the available materials in the other supporting testimony. MSDE will serve as the administering entity for the grants. Additionally, the legislation would include matching funds that MSDE would have discretion to allocate to eligible applicants. This legislation will not intrude on in-class teaching material, nor will it extract funding for classroom resources. Instead, open-source phonics serve to supplement classroom instruction by providing additional support for students who need it.

Various Maryland counties, such as Howard, have stated that due to additional phonics instruction, reading scores increased by 5.8 percentage points from 2019 to 2023.⁵ This upward trend illustrates that phonics programs are immensely helpful for students in primary education, and therefore worth the investment.

The Open-Source Phonics Matching Grant Program Act will encourage nonprofits to provide supplemental phonic materials for free, which will give our schools an alternative to expensive, commercial phonics programs. The legislation will aid in the effort to improve childhood literacy throughout the state of Maryland, cementing an equitable future in the process. I urge a favorable report.

⁵ Griffith, Kristen, and Liz Bowie. "Maryland Schools Taught Reading the Wrong Way for Decades. That's Changing." The Baltimore Banner, October 10, 2023. <https://www.thebaltimorebanner.com/education/k-12-schools/maryland-science-of-reading-AWTHRJGLYJCUTLFMMRBIPQVMOU/#:~:text=The%20system%20spent%20%E2%80%9Cquite%20a,points%20from%202019%20to%202023>.

HB475 Literacy Testimony - Byron Johns 27March2024

Uploaded by: Marc Korman

Position: FAV

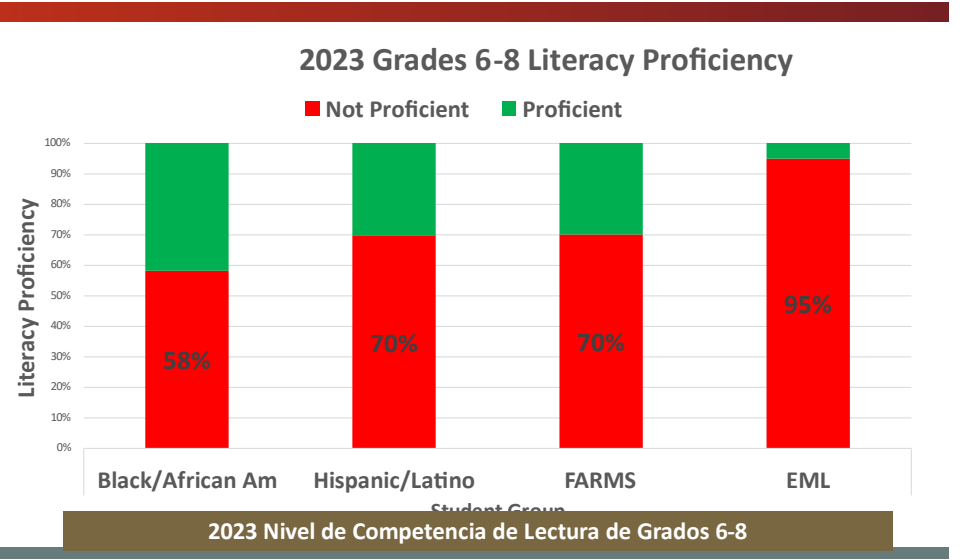
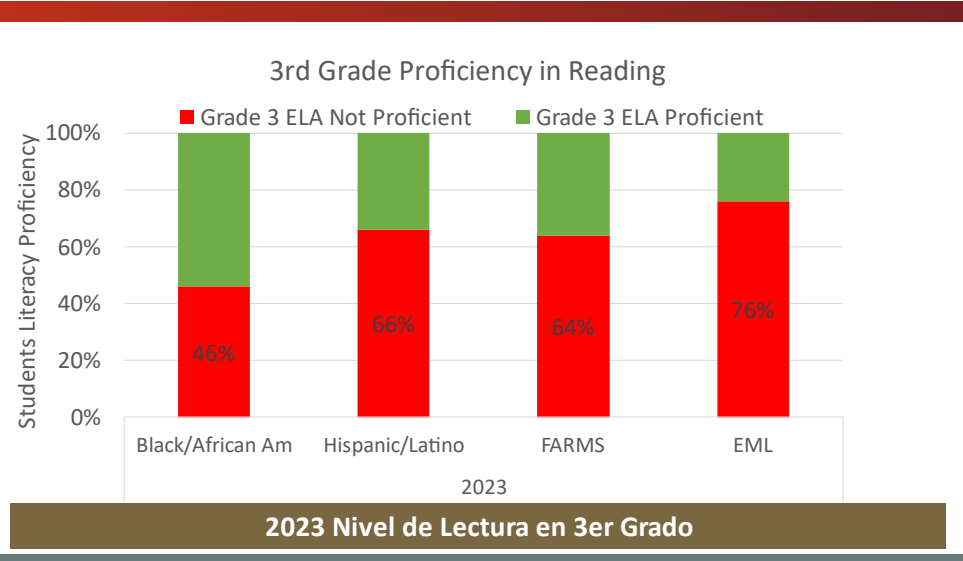
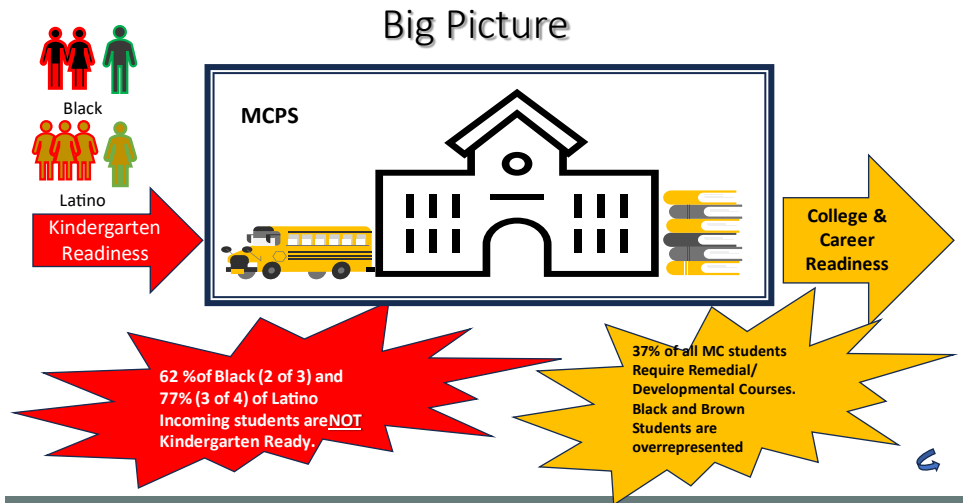
My name is Byron Johns, and I am the Education Chair for the Montgomery County Maryland branch of the NAACP and lead the NAACP Parents' Council, recruiting and leading Representatives in each of the district's 211 schools advocating for Black and other minorities to have access to equitable educational opportunities. I am also co-founder of the Black and Brown Coalition for Educational Equity and Excellence (BBC), working with Identity, a Latino advocacy organization, to dismantle systemic barriers in Education that disadvantage Black, Brown and children of low-income families.

Early literacy for students of color is critically important to education equity

The BBC and Parents' Council have focused advocacy on early literacy as one of our top priorities. In MCPS, 2 out of 3 Black, and 3 out of 4 Brown/Latinx children are not Kindergarten Ready when they start formal schooling. Reading is the foundational skill for all other subjects which is why schools teach children to 'learn to read' from Kindergarten to 3rd grade, and 'read to learn' after 3rd grade. By Middle School, more than 6 years later, nearly 1 in 2 Black students and 3 in 4 Brown students **do not meet** Literacy Proficiency standards. Maryland ranks 40th in the United States in reading with just **30% of fourth-grade students** and **33% of eighth-grade students** At or Above Proficient based on the Natl Assessment for Educational Proficiency test (NAEP).

With so many children not starting with or gaining proficiency in reading skills, it is more critical than ever that resource investments and effective methods based on the Science of Reading immediately be one of all Maryland school district's highest priorities. Solutions that address the scale of this deficiency include, 1) aligning our teacher preparation standards to the science of reading, and 2) empowering parents and caregivers with tools and materials that enable them to support developmental reading skills.

We support passage of HB475 which will promote development and deployment of tools and materials aligned to the Science of Reading.



ronatestimonyfinal.pdf

Uploaded by: Rona Schwartz

Position: FAV

To: Energy, Education, and the Environment Committee

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

Position: Favorable

Dear Chair Brian Feldman:

I am Dr. Rona Schwartz, a family physician who lives in Maryland and has worked in Washington D.C. for over 17 years. I am also on the Steering Committee of Open Source Phonics and support HB 475 because it will encourage nonprofits to create more resources for families who struggle with reading.

The majority of my patients are low-income. I often talk to parents about how their children are doing in school—parents are confused and anxious when their children struggle. Sometimes they wonder if their children are unmotivated to do well or if there are other barriers to their learning, like being unable to read.

In addition to seeing parents concerned about their children's progress in school, I also see patients who are low literacy themselves and see how struggles with literacy impact their lives and wellness in a variety of ways, including following up on suggestions that would benefit their health.

When physicians serve patients who are struggling financially, we do not want to recommend programs or resources that come with a cost that will add to the family's burdens. We are constantly looking for no-cost resources—whether for nutrition, mental health, summer camps, tutoring, or fitness.

I support HB 475 because it will provide free resources to parents looking to help their children with literacy. Because the Maryland State Department of Education would administer the grant, parents could be assured that the

resources would be effective. For physicians like myself, who are not experts in literacy, and for social workers, nurses, and others who work with families having recommendations for free resources that are free and high quality would be very helpful.

Sincerely,

 Recoverable Signature

X Rona Schwartz

Rona Schwartz

MD

Signed by: Rona Schwartz

Rona Schwartz MD

HB475 LOO.pdf

Uploaded by: Dr. Carey Wright

Position: UNF

TO: Senate Committee on Education, Energy, and the Environment

BILL: House Bill (HB) 475 - Education - Open-Source Phonics Matching Grant Program - Establishment (Open-Source Phonics Matching Grant Program Act)

DATE: March 27, 2024

POSITION: Oppose

EXPLANATION:

The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) and the Maryland State Board of Education (State Board) respectfully oppose House Bill (HB) 475 – Education - Open-Source Phonics Matching Grant Program - Establishment (Open-Source Phonics Matching Grant Program Act), which seeks to require MSDE to serve as the pass-through agency for the newly established Open-Source Phonics Matching Grant Program. The legislation also makes MSDE responsible for developing the grant application, reviewing applications, ensuring matching funds, and submitting a bi-annual report to the general assembly beginning on or before December 1, 2025.

The State Board and MSDE are dedicated to ensuring that high-quality phonics materials continue to be available for and distributed widely to Maryland families. However, as written, the proposed grant program does not bestow the necessary oversight to MSDE to assess the rigor of the developed materials. HB 475 would allow open-source phonics organizations that receive a grant to provide phonics learning materials to be used in tutoring Maryland public school students. Although MSDE would review and evaluate grant applications, the Department will not have the discretion to ensure the materials are appropriately rigorous and align with the science of reading. This introduces a risk of distributing unproven materials to families across Maryland, which MSDE regards as a version of legislating curriculum that has not been appropriately vetted by the Department.

In partnership with the General Assembly and other stakeholders, MSDE and the State Board are willing to work to develop a competitive grant program in the future that is focused on building access to phonics materials and that aligns with our shared mission, vision, and the science of reading. With the necessary guardrails in place to protect quality, MSDE will be able to hold future grant recipients accountable for how the funds are used and whether they achieve the intended goals. As proposed, the Department is concerned that there may be less incentive for recipients to innovate or continuously evaluate themselves for improvement.

The Department and the State Board respectfully request that the committee consider this information on **HB 475**. Please contact Dr. Akilah Alleyne, Executive Director of Government Affairs, Education Policy, and Government Relations, at Akilah.alleyne@maryland.gov or at 410-767-0504 or Zach Hands, Executive Director of the State Board, at Zachary.hands1@maryland.gov or at 443-915-6094, if you would like any additional information.