



Free State PTA

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Written Testimony Submitted for the Record to the Maryland House Ways and Means Committee - For the Hearing on Public Middle and High Schools – Start Time for Instruction - Requirement (HB1418) March 6, 2024
SUPPORT

Free State PTA represents over 50,000 volunteer members and families in over 500 public schools. Free State PTA is composed of families, students, teachers, administrators, and business as well as community leaders devoted to the educational success of children and family engagement in Maryland. As the state’s premier and largest child advocacy organization, Free State PTA is a powerful voice for all children, a relevant resource for families, schools and communities and a strong advocate for public education.

Free State PTA supports House Bill 1418, requiring middle and high schools to implement safe and healthy school start times, meaning not before 8am for middle schools and not before 8:30am for high schools. This aligns with recommendations from the American Academy of Pediatrics, the Centers for Disease Control, the U.S. Surgeon General, National PTA, and many other professional organizations.

Across Maryland, thousands of students are on the bus in the 6am hour or earlier. These hours are incompatible with known sleep patterns of teenagers, most of whom need about 9 hours of sleep a night. Physiology limits most adolescents’ ability to fall asleep much before 11 p.m., regardless of homework and extracurricular demands or electronic distractions.

Just as it’s hard to learn when you are hungry, it’s hard to learn when you have algebra an hour before your biological clock is set to “wake.” It’s also hard to grow and be healthy. Sleep deprivation impairs attention, memory, and judgment. It also leads to mood swings, obesity, substance abuse, immune disorders, depression, suicide, risky behaviors, and even car accidents. When schools delay bell times, mood, performance in class and on tests improve, and sports performance improves; truancy, tardiness, and drop-out rates decrease, and teens actually get more sleep per night. Even rates of car crashes decrease.

With careful planning and strong leadership, this change **does not** have to add to district transportation costs – in some districts across the nation, changing to safe and healthy school start times, as required by this bill, have served as a money saving strategy. We recommend the fiscal note be updated to reflect additional data.

As the 2014 joint report from Maryland's Departments of Health and Education eloquently stated:

“Any consideration of a statewide mandate for a later school start time must consider the unique needs of each of the 24 local jurisdictions. However, in preserving the status quo whereby school start times are a matter for each local jurisdiction, the state risks letting local resistance trump a strong body of scientific evidence that sleep is critical to health and academic achievement.”

Free State PTA urges the members of the House Ways and Means Committee to use your leadership to prevent what the report predicted: letting local resistance trump the scientific evidence. Please pass this bill to start school later.

Free State PTA urges a favorable vote in support of House Bill 1418.

Thank you,

Free State PTA, Advocacy Committee