

**HB 1234: County Boards of Education - Volunteer Aides - School Chaplain**  
**Ways and Means Committee Hearing:**  
**Wednesday, February 28, 2024**

Members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee:

As a parent and teacher, I strongly urge you to oppose HB 1234. The bill is a thinly veiled attempt to bring religion into Maryland's public schools.

According to Pew Research, 31% of Maryland's population do not consider themselves Christians (<https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/religious-landscape-study/state/maryland/>). In fall of 2022, approximately 890,000 students were enrolled in Maryland's public schools. That means 275,900 of those children would not be served at all by a Christian chaplain. Even within the 69% of Christian families, Protestant families are unlikely to want their children to be spiritually guided by a Catholic, Mormon, or Orthodox chaplain, and vice versa. Without ensuring that every volunteer chaplain has training not only in ministering to multi-faith and no-faith communities, but also in working specifically with children, this bill would allow proselytizing to occur in the public schools. That amount of training is a lot to ask of someone who is not going to get paid for the service they provide within the school.

Baltimore County Public School's current volunteer application (see [https://cdnsm5-ss3.sharpschool.com/UserFiles/Servers/Server\\_9046799/File/Updated%20Documents/Application%20for%20Volunteer%20Services%20ADA.pdf](https://cdnsm5-ss3.sharpschool.com/UserFiles/Servers/Server_9046799/File/Updated%20Documents/Application%20for%20Volunteer%20Services%20ADA.pdf)) does not ask about the prospective volunteer's job experience or qualifications because most of the tasks assigned to volunteers are something most adults, and even teenagers, are capable of doing, such as making copies or helping in the library. An entirely different application would need to be created for possible candidates for school chaplain, as well as a committee that is knowledgeable enough to choose a volunteer who is going to be capable of working with all students within the school system. That amounts to a lot of additional work for school system staff that could be better devoted to improving education in secular ways!

For all of those reasons listed above, I strongly urge you to give HB 1234 an UNFAVORABLE report.

Miriam Snare  
Nottingham, MD