



LOYOLA UNIVERSITY MARYLAND

— 1852 —

Department of Psychology

March 4, 2024

The Honorable Delegate April Miller
Ways and Means Committee
Annapolis, MD

Re: MD1418 (Miller) Public Middle and High Schools - Start Time for Instruction – Requirement SUPPORT

Dear Delegate Miller:

I write to support House Bill 1418, which would require the school day for middle schools to begin no earlier than 8:00am and High Schools to begin no earlier than 8:30am.

I'm a Professor of Psychology at Loyola University Maryland, a member of the Start School Later Board of Advisors, the Sleep Research Society Board of Directors, and the Start School Later Baltimore City Chapter. I have been engaged in adolescent sleep and circadian rhythms and school start time research for over 30 years and I'm currently collaborating with Secretary Vincent Schiraldi and colleagues on work that will help us improve the sleep environment and sleep-wake schedules for youth residing in Maryland's DJS facilities so that we might decrease recidivism and positively impact behavior and school performance.

Although I returned to Maryland nearly 10 years ago, the blue crab state is near and dear to my heart as I was born in Washington DC, I attended Crest Haven Elementary School in Silver Spring, and my two nieces and two nephews attended middle and high school in Montgomery County.

My research, some federal funded, has focused on adolescents' sleep needs and daytime functioning with a particular focus on emotional well-being, substance use, and academic performance. I am a co-author of the 2014 American Academy of Pediatrics' Policy Statement of School Start Times for Adolescents. This policy statement (backed by extensive scientific research) advises that for school districts to optimize sleep in students, they need to urge high schools and middle schools to aim for start times that allow students the opportunity to achieve optimal levels of sleep (8.5–9.5 hours) and to improve physical (e.g., reduced obesity risk) and psychological (e.g., decrease depression, suicide risk, and attention difficulties) health, safety (e.g., drowsy driving crashes), academic and athletic performance, and overall quality of life.

My colleagues and I from sleep researchers to pediatricians, school psychologists, economists, and middle/high school educators know that insufficient sleep in adolescents as an important public health issue that significantly affects the health and safety and success of Maryland's middle and high

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school students. By supporting HB1418 into law you and all of Maryland will help to ensure healthy, safe, and equitable school hours not just in Maryland but throughout the nation. It is noteworthy that California and Florida have passed similar legislation, and a number of other states are now considering such critical and timely legislation.

With the onset of puberty, most adolescents begin to experience a sleep–wake “phase delay” (later sleep and wake times), manifested as a shift of up to 2 hours compared to their younger peers. At the same time, teens’ sleep needs do not decline from preadolescent levels, and optimal sleep for most teenagers is in the range of 8.5 to 9.5 hours per night. On a practical level, this means, and studies show that the average teenager has difficulty falling asleep before 11:00 PM and is best suited to wake at 8:00 AM or later --- making it challenging to get sufficient sleep if middle/high school start before 8:30 AM. Keep in mind that long commute times and multiple buses (e.g., Baltimore City) add to the sleep and start time challenge.

I have no doubt that based on longstanding school start time research and real-world examples from school districts throughout the US have demonstrated that delaying school start times is an effective countermeasure to chronic sleep loss and has definitive benefits to **all students**: academic success, physical and mental health, and safety, particularly prevention of serious and life-threatening sleepy driver accidents.

I know that Maryland has a long history of implementing policies that protect the health of children and adolescents. **Please lead Maryland and the nation and support MD1418 to ensure healthy, safe, and equitable school hours for our adolescents.**

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Amy R. Wolfson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Amy R. Wolfson, Ph.D.
Professor of Psychology