



Maryland | Statewide

health, safety and equity in education

March 4, 2024

Good Afternoon Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins, and Members of the Ways and Means Committee,

I am Lisa VanBuskirk of Start School Later Maryland. Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in **support of HB-1418: Public Middle and High Schools – Start Time for Instruction – Requirement.**

Following the 2016 passage of then Delegate (now Lieutenant Governor) Aruna Miller's *HB 83- Orange Ribbon Bil for Healthy School Hours*, I created a state-wide chapter of Start School Later to track the progress of school start times. Bottom line, there has been limited progress in the past eight years.

The research on the benefits of safer, healthier, and age-appropriate school hours has only grown since the General Assembly passed related legislation in 2014 and 2016. It is no longer of a question of *Why* adjust school hours to those recommended for student physical and mental health and safety, but *How* to adjust school hours.

With the exception of Anne Arundel County and Howard Counties, which had been discussing school start times since the late 1990's (and have local chapters of Start School Later to lead the advocacy efforts), no other Maryland school system has initiated a change in school start times based on the recommendations of public health and education experts, since the General Assembly passed legislation in 2014 and 2016. **Both Anne Arundel County (school year 2022-2023) and Howard County (school year 2023-2024) implemented new school hours at zero additional cost** (in contrast to the outdated cost estimates listed in the HB-1418 Fiscal Note).

What helped both school systems implement safer, healthier, and more age-appropriate school start times (in addition to over two decades of advocacy from parents, teachers, students, and health and education experts) was the use of outside consultants to help the school system think through their transportation policies and operations, as well as teach them to fully use their transportation routing software¹. As recently as 2021, the Office of Legislative Audits noted that 18 of 24 school systems were not fully using their school

¹<https://www.aacps.org/cms/lib/MD02215556/Centricity/Domain/280/Transportation%20Services%20Comprehensive%20Evaluation%201-8-20.pdf> and https://www.startschoollater.net/uploads/9/7/9/6/9796500/01_13_2021_school_start_times_br.pdf

bus routing software.² If the school systems actually used their school bus systems appropriately, transportation would not be the large obstacle it is currently perceived to be. Thus, *How* to implement remains the biggest challenge for school systems. Transportation is not the biggest obstacle to new school hours. Fear of change is the largest obstacle.

Furthermore, the overreliance on local school system to enact new school hours is actually a barrier to improvement in Maryland students' physical and mental health, safety, and academics. School systems need your help in setting a floor for the earliest start times and eliminating the fear of change. Just as the General Assembly sets the floor for minimum total hours of school and/or minimum number of school days, so to, can the General Assembly set a minimum school start time.

If both Florida and California legislations can agree that school start time have become the responsibility of the state government (and it may be one of the rare things on which those two states agree), as well as the number of other states considering similar legislation, including next door in Pennsylvania, then Maryland's legislators can and should, assume similar responsibilities when local school boards fail to act in the interest of student health and safety³.

I ask for a favorable report on HB-1418: Public Middle and High Schools – Start Time for Instruction – Requirement.

Thank you,



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² <https://www.ola.state.md.us/Search/Report?keyword=&agencyId=&dateFrom=&dateTo=&reportTypeId4=4>

³ <https://www.startschoollater.net/legislation.html>