

Subject: Favorable of HB1076

Date: February 21, 2024

To: House Ways and Means Committee

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Please support HB1076, a bill that establishes procedures for blind K-12 students to receive text of instructional materials in Braille, and graphics in a standardized, high quality tactile form, by shifting the responsibility for paying for these materials to the Maryland State department of education.

I have two blind daughters who attend Patterson Park Public Charter School in Baltimore City. Oriana is in the eighth grade, and Elizabeth is in the sixth grade. Many people think if the textbook a class is using is online a blind student will automatically be successful. This is not necessarily true. My daughters have math and geography where they need to touch maps, shapes, and graphs to interpret them. There is no way to truly understand a map or graph by just listening to a description. Also, you cannot always gain the same type of information as your sighted peers if you are using homemade maps, or maps which, though made in a standard way, do not contain all the information found on a map the sighted students are using. This problem can be solved by the provisions of this bill. Technology exists to make quality versions of tactile maps and tactile graphics. There are standards in place to ensure these maps and graphs give all the information in a tactile way sighted students receive by looking at these materials. These types of materials are also those used on standardized tests, so if blind students do not receive them throughout the school year, they are at an intense disadvantage when taking standardized tests if they have never felt materials presented in this standard way. At present, we lack the accountability and administrative procedures to require these types of high-quality materials to be provided to all blind students throughout the state of Maryland.

Please vote in favor of HB1076.