

Testimony in Support of Maryland House Bills
HB0997: Green Schools - Model Professional Development Facilities - Designation

Wednesday February 21, 2024

Honorable Maryland House Delegates, Members of the Maryland House of Delegates Ways & Means Committees, and Fellow Maryland Citizens,

My name is Doug Lombardi, Ph.D., Professor of Human Development and Associate Dean for Faculty Affairs, College of Education, University of Maryland, College Park. I come before you today in support of House Bill 0997: Green Schools - Model Professional Development Facilities Designation and House Bill 1102: Maryland Green Schools - Website Update and Maintenance.

As an expert in science teaching and learning, particularly around scientific topics of social relevance such as environmental sustainability, I can personally attest to the high value that Maryland Green Schools have in maintaining a clean and healthy environment, as well as ensuring a thriving and sustainable future for all State of Maryland citizens. My research, which is generously funded by the U.S. National Science Foundation, is situated in hundreds of middle and high schools science and social studies classrooms throughout the Mid-Atlantic and Southeastern United States. In partnership with teachers and students, we develop, empirically test, and disseminate classroom ready resources to help teachers and their students activate their critical, scientific, and civically-minded thinking about the local, regional, and global challenges related to our environment and well-being. With teachers as active members of our research and development teams, we position students to more deeply learn fundamental concepts in science and civics, and help them develop the knowledge, skills, and agency to become critical and creative problem solvers. We collect a tremendous amount of data and observations and conduct robust statistical and discourse analyses which show that children and adolescents want to and can become problem solvers in their communities, now and in the future, to help address complex challenges, such as availability of clean and freshwater resources.

Parents and teachers play a key role in helping children and adolescents understand their local and regional environments. Within the context of formal schooling and through relevant, community-centered knowledge building activities, teachers and staff empower students for STEM and civic achievement. Within the context of sustainability, teachers open up the pathways for students to learn the fundamental science that supports thriving ecosystems services (fresh water, clean air, fertile fields, and green spaces), and ensure healthy communities and a thriving economy. However, teaching about the complexities of environmental sustainability often can be difficult. Teachers and staff need our help. They need the space, tools, and resources to engage as a community of educational practitioners to position students for achievement.

Although the Maryland Green Schools serve as a hub of scientific and civic teaching activity that effectively supports parent, student, and teacher collaboration and cooperation, we need to

ease the burden on teachers and staff. Maryland HB 997 is a forward step toward ensuring that Green Schools provide exemplary models of engaging scientific and technical spaces. As a professional development model, Green Schools should facilitate teachers' and staff's acquisition of state-of-the science education resources that can help children and parents--as vested community members--to learn fundamental scientific data collection, observation skills, and knowledge to support fair and sustainable practices.

The many environments and ecosystems of Maryland are unparalleled in our nation. The people of our state have access to green mountains, pastoral fields, clean vibrant waters, and abundant resources. These environments and ecosystems are often under threat and, as trusted representatives of our Maryland communities, it is our responsibility to be careful and collaborative stewards of these wonderful environmental resources. Children, adolescents, teachers, and staff join us in this stewardship. HB 997 and HB 1107 will help ensure that teachers and staff can help their students and parents work together with state-of-the-science and best educational resources to construct a greener and brighter future for all of us.