



LOYOLA UNIVERSITY MARYLAND

— 1852 —

Department of Psychology

March 3, 2025

Senate Education, Energy, and Environment Committee
Annapolis, MD

Re: **SB 468 School Start Time Legislation SUPPORT**

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

I write to support **Senate Bill 468**, which would set guardrails for bell times for middle schools at 8:00am and High Schools at 8:30am.

I'm a Professor of Psychology at Loyola University Maryland and a member of the Start School Later Board of Directors. I have been engaged in adolescent sleep and school start time research for over 30 years. Although I returned to Maryland nearly 10 years ago, the blue crab state is near and dear to my heart as I graduated from Crest Haven Elementary School in Silver Spring.

My research, some federally funded, has focused on adolescents' sleep needs and daytime functioning with particular attention to emotional well-being, substance use, and school performance. I am a co-author of the *2014 American Academy of Pediatrics' Policy Statement on School Start Times for Adolescents* and the recent Abell Foundation report: *Later School Start Times for Adolescents in Baltimore City Public Schools: Opportunities and Recommendations*. This report states:

"Consistent with the concept that a student's opportunity to obtain sufficient and regular sleep should not depend on Zip code, we recommend that City Schools support legislation setting statewide parameters as guardrails to ensure that schools cannot require students to be in class at unsafe, unhealthy, and counterproductive times..."

My colleagues and I, from sleep researchers to pediatricians, school psychologists, economists, middle/high school educators, and my students know that insufficient sleep in adolescents is an important public health issue that significantly affects the success of Maryland's middle and high school students. By supporting **SB 468 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. Maryland should take the lead as it has done for decades in the interest of our children's health, safety, and school performance!

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 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 schools 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 (e.g., **Anne Arundel Country**) have demonstrated that delaying school start times is an effective countermeasure to chronic sleep loss and has definitive benefits for **all students**: school success, physical and mental health, and safety, particularly prevention of 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 SB 468 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 extending to the right.

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