



health, safety and equity in education

Testimony for SB 468

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Distinguished Members of the Committee:

My name is Maribel Ibrahim and I am the Operations Director and Co-Founder of Start School Later. I'm also the Facilities Director of the Anne Arundel County Public Library and a parent of 2 AACPS students and a graduate.

As a Facilities Director, I understand that while libraries have the ability to run their operations as they see fit, we have requirements for potable water, heating and air conditioning, and life safety that supersede local operations. These are guardrails that ensure safety and they allow libraries to run their operations locally within these health and safety guidelines.

Similarly, schools have similar state level requirements for successful education, such as state mandated days of education in a calendar year, fire safety, testing water quality, sprinklers and HVAC controls. In the same way, HB 1015 seeks to provide guardrails to ensure that students are going to school at a time that is healthy and safe for them to attend.

I have the privilege of experiencing a successful school start time change firsthand. My younger two children are benefiting from more rest, less stress, and the ability to make better decisions without suffering from a cloud of sleep deprivation. My oldest suffered through going to school in the dark and he benefited tremendously physically and emotionally during the virtual learning days of COVID and Anne Arundel's subsequent successful change to healthy and safe school start times for all students.

However, this change took over two decades of wishing to become a reality. The confluence of COVID and remote learning, our proven ability to pivot, and seeking nontraditional solutions led to this change. Too many other school districts are putting safe and healthy school start times on the back burner as they contend with too many other competing priorities. Not having this legislation allows many school districts to avoid this seemingly complex issue and relegate it as a choice.

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The science tells us that **to continue with unsafe and unhealthy school start times** (prior to 830am for HS and MS) **is to do harm**. Students across the county continue to suffer and our country is experiencing a **sleep deprivation and mental health epidemic** that is masked by high performance, an overload of activities and mounting pressure that worsens and perpetuates this cycle.

Just like fire safety and occupancy requirements in buildings, school start time legislation will assist schools with prioritizing student health and will enable them to make the change more effectively so that generations of children do not continue to suffer. These guardrails will assist schools and allow them to locally manage their schedules within healthy guidelines.

The state has legislation on the books for library funding and capital projects. This legislation has enabled every Maryland county to benefit from funding so the aging buildings can be renovated and modern spaces created. While the legislation does not completely fund renovation projects, state legislation has spurred innovation and creativity at the local level and even rural districts benefit from capital improvements as a result.

Similarly, SB 468 will enable and inspire schools to develop creative, low cost solutions for school start times that are safe and healthy for all students. While there is a fiscal note attached to this legislation, any transportation costs that are reported are perceptions that are not based on actual planning or analysis of where we can gain transportation improvements. Just like a planning study that is used for facilities projects, investing in transportation studies with transportation consultants can yield tremendous savings, boost efficiency and provide for nontraditional solutions.

We need to do what is right for children and protect their health. SB 468 would be a **guardrail** that allows school systems to locally control when their schools start, within safe and healthy parameters. Maryland took the lead with the first successful legislation to study school start times. Let's lead again and help our schools make the changes that need to happen. Please report favorably on SB 468.

Sincerely,

Maribel Ibrahim

Severna Park, MD

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