

**HB0493 - Public Schools - Commemorative Day – Ruby Bridges Walk to School Day – Senate Education, Energy and the Environment Committee
FAVORABLE**

March 18, 2025

Chair Feldman and Committee Members,

As the longtime PTO president of Mount Rainier Elementary School in Prince George's County, **I respectfully request a favorable recommendation and Senate passage of HB0493**, a bill to designate November 14 as Ruby Bridges Walk to School Day in Maryland and establish educational resources to help teach Ruby's story.

I have been a PTO leader for 6 years – and Ruby Bridges Walk to School Day is one of the most meaningful, impactful events our school has done. We have learned that when students and families *walk* together, they *talk* together. Walking brings communities closer together.

But Ruby Bridges Walk to School Day is much more than a walking event or ceremonial day.

It is part of Maryland's history – a heroic, resilient example of the values we're most proud of. Each of you walk past Thurgood Marshall as you enter the Capitol – and Ruby's story is an important continuation of his legacy and his work on *Brown v. Board of Education* to make quality, equal education available to all and ensure every student feels welcome.

At Mount Rainier Elementary, we have made every effort to elevate this event beyond being ceremonial. Our PTO purchased and donated more than a dozen books either written by Ruby or telling her story. We invite special guests and elected officials to read to students and teach Ruby's story to every classroom. Hallways are decorated with Ruby Bridges-inspired student artwork. This past November, we partnered with a local business, Ethnicitees, to design custom shirts honoring Ruby.

Students instantly understand the significance of Ruby's story, as well as the lessons it can teach us today. In one class this past November, we discussed how Ruby is proof that *kids* can be superheroes too, each with the power to change the world.

Our kids need a few of those superheroes right now. Because what Ruby *really* taught is the lesson that in our schools, every child belongs, every family must be welcome, and all of us are equal. Ruby Bridges and her walk to school proved that a few courageous steps forward can change the world – and for Maryland students, she is the perfect hero for this moment.

In recent years, California and New Jersey have passed similar legislation to celebrate Ruby Bridges on November 14. Oregon's legislature is currently debating a Ruby Bridges commemorative day. What sets Maryland apart is our opportunity to be the first state to both celebrate Ruby Bridges Walk to School Day and formally incorporate an educational component.

I want to give special thanks to Delegate Diana Fennell for her support of this event and sponsorship of this legislation. We had the pleasure of hosting Delegate Fennell at our 2023 and 2024 Ruby Bridges Walk to School Days, and are honored to work with her to bring this event to other school communities in Maryland. We are equally grateful to Senator Joanne Benson for her support of this legislation in the Senate, plus more than twenty Delegates who joined this effort as sponsors.

We also want to recognize and thank the Safe Routes Partnership, a national advocacy organization that works to advance safe walking to and from schools, for their support of HB0493. And we thank the Good Intentions Foundation and other groups who have offered favorable testimony on behalf this bill. Finally, one of the most rewarding parts of advocating on behalf of HB0493 has been working with Commodore John Rodgers, a school in Baltimore City whose Student Government helped plan their own Ruby Bridges Walk to School Day last November. Being able to work with their faculty and provide their students the opportunity to reflect on their own Ruby Bridges experiences and practice civic engagement is a reminder that the positive impact this event has on students is the most compelling reason for HB0493's passage. I encourage each of you to read these student reflections, which have been submitted as separate written testimony by their faculty advisor.

Thank you for consideration of this bill, and I respectfully urge a favorable recommendation for HB0493 and Ruby Bridges Walk to School Day.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Timothy Meyer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Timothy Meyer

President, Mount Rainier Elementary PTO