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of Howard County**

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**Board of Education of Howard County
Testimony Submitted to the Maryland House Senate,
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
April 1, 2025**

Good afternoon Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and members of the Education, Energy and the Environment Committee. My name is Jennifer Swickard Mallo and I am here today to offer testimony in opposition to HB1169 on behalf of the Board of Education of Howard County. I serve as both a Board member and Chair of the Board's Legislative Committee.

As a local elected body, the Board of Education of Howard County is responsible for setting governing policies for the Howard County Public School System (HCPSS), managing a billion dollar budget, employing nearly 9,000 employees, educating 57,000 students, and conducting responsible stewardship of taxpayer revenues. Given this significant obligation entrusted to us by the voters and the intimate understanding of school system operations; we firmly believe the Board is the entity that should have the authority to set the local school system calendar.

While the Board's written testimony outlines more details regarding the calendar setting process in Howard County, I want to focus on a particular concern that had not been an issue in calendar planning until this legislation was introduced

Holidays proposed under HB1169, particularly those that are based on the lunar calendar, are often not set until the weeks or days leading up to the event.

A recent example is the celebration of Eid-Al-Fitr. As of the writing of this testimony, simply searching for the date of the holiday online would indicate the holiday was likely to fall around March 30 if the moon is visible on March 29, but it could be March 29, 30, or 31. The most common practice is that Eid begins when Saudi Arabia declares the crescent moon sighted, marking the end of Ramadan and the start of Eid-Al-Fitr. If HB1169 were to pass, HCPSS could very easily end up being out of compliance at the last minute without a practical way to shift dates.

Under current practice, calendar planning and setting typically starts two years in advance of a school year. The HCPSS Calendar Committee makes recommendations to account for operational impacts of, and honor the holiday celebrations, listed in HB1169 in conjunction with state mandated holidays and stipulations of the contracts with teachers and staff as well as meeting state requirements for number of hours and days of instruction, and operational needs.

Let me be clear, the Board does not oppose the inclusion of the holidays identified in HB1169 in the local calendar as set by the Board on the recommendations of the Calendar Committee based on operational need.

Although only currently applicable to Howard and Montgomery Counties, passing HB1169 sets a precedent for calendar planning that can easily be a slippery slope for other counties that could extend school years and constrain local planning.

For these reasons, we urge an UNFAVORABLE report on HB1169 from this Committee.