



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB0468

Public Middle, High, and Charter Schools - Start Time for Instruction

March 5, 2025

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

I strongly support SB0468– Public Middle, High, and Charter Schools - Start Time for Instruction, which would require public middle and high school to begin instruction not earlier than 8 a.m. and 8:30 a.m., respectively, and require each county board of education (or public charter school) to implement a public service campaign to raise awareness on sleep deprivation and later school start times.

Although I am writing this letter as a life-long Maryland resident and parent of children in Baltimore County Schools, I bring extensive experience through my profession as a Public Health researcher who has spent over 15 years studying policies that promote child health. As a nutritional epidemiologist, I often study approaches to promote healthy eating and physical activity among children. In recent years, my research has also incorporated healthy sleep behaviors. I have reviewed the literature on healthy school start times. The evidence is clear- policies that ensure school start times are after 8:00am for adolescents (or later) support student learning, breakfast consumption, tardiness and absenteeism, mental health, behavior issues... the list goes on. Adolescent brains are not wired for early mornings. This policy will put into place recommendations from the American Academy of Pediatrics, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and many others. Several Maryland school districts have already adopted this policy, and it is time that the state of Maryland put into place a state-wide healthy school start times policy.

In addition to my profession, I have taken on service roles including serving as the elected chair of the Maryland State School Health Council (2018-present) and a governor-appointed member of the Baltimore County Board of Education (2000-2023). In 2023, the Maryland State School Health Council hosted a well-attended webinar on Healthy School Start Times that led to continued conversations about policy changes at the local and state level. I was thrilled when I heard about SB0468. This is an amazing opportunity for Maryland students. I regret that we did not tackle this topic during my time on the Baltimore County Board of Education. Although we had several conversations about moving it forward, we never formalized a policy. On a personal note, I still remember my worst grade in high school came my junior year at Lansdowne High School in Baltimore County. I barely passed Physics, despite it being taught by my favorite teacher and my tendency to do well in STEM classes. It was my first class of the day, and I simply could not stay awake. Circadian rhythms are real, and we need to ensure that schools are aligned to support our students have what they need to be successful.

In closing, I want to reiterate that healthy school start times are beneficial to students for many reasons, and **I ask the committee to make a favorable report on SB0468.**

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Erin R. Hager".

Erin R. Hager, PhD

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