



MARYLAND | MONTGOMERY COUNTY  
health, safety and equity in education

**Testimony of Sandra S. Landis, Montgomery County Chapter Leader**

**Start School Later on SB 468**

**March 5, 2025**

Dear Members of the Maryland General Assembly and Interested Parties,

Thank you so much for the privilege of submitting this testimony regarding SB 468 – Public, Middle, High and Charter Schools Start Time for Instruction. My name is Sandra Landis, and I am the [Montgomery County Chapter Leader of Start School Later](#), a national organization dedicated to ensuring school start times compatible with health, safety, education and equity. I simultaneously serve as Bell Time Subcommittee Chair of the [Montgomery County Council of PTAs](#) (MCCPTA). Both roles work synergistically to underscore the single mission focus of safe and healthy bell times for secondary school students.

Most of our public schools in the State are not complying with healthy school start times recommended by nearly every medical group in the country, including the [U.S. Surgeon General](#), [American Academy of Pediatrics](#), and [Centers for Disease Control](#). Studies show that teenagers need 8 – 10 hours of sleep, yet their onset of sleep is metabolically delayed until approximately 11 pm. Compounding this sleep deficit is the fact that current

bell times require our teens to be awakened for school during the most critical time of their sleep cycles, which occurs toward its end, when higher level brain functions develop including reasoning, problem solving and good judgement. Hence, our operational decisions interfere with our students' ability to develop the very critical thinking skills we want them to have to access the curriculum, and to succeed in school and in their lives.

Adolescents who get insufficient or poor quality sleep are more likely to report symptoms of depression, hopelessness, suicidal thoughts and attempts, irritability and impaired emotional regulation. If this isn't concerning enough, sleep deprivation is linked to the two leading causes of death in adolescents: accidents (namely, [car crashes](#)) and [suicide](#) (Tefft, 2018; Lee et al., 2012). Bell times that are too early are associated with aggression and gun violence. Sadly, these latter findings track to Montgomery County's experience between 2019 and 2023, where juvenile crime increased 95%.

The day after the hearing on HB 1015, the MCCPTA enacted a resolution regarding [Healthy Sleep for Adolescents](#). In recognition of teenagers' need for more sleep, in 2015 Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) delayed bell times by 20 minutes to the current high school class start time of 7:45 a.m. MCCPTA has included completing the bell time change to achieve safe and healthy bell times in our Advocacy Priorities for the past 4 years to encourage MCPS to "finish the job" and set medically recommended school start times, but we haven't seen any action on this from the Montgomery County Board of Education or MCPS. To get more traction on this and show

that parents view it as a priority, the standalone resolution was enacted with the hopes of elevating this important issue.

Some school districts might want to claim “local control” over this issue. The Montgomery County Board of Education ascribes to that philosophy. However, with local control comes responsibility, which most Maryland localities have shirked. This is precisely why this legislation continues to be warranted.

The MCCPTA speaks with one voice for all 160,000 + students and 210 schools in the largest school district in Maryland. Absent enactment of SB 468, I have no idea how many more decades of inaction on this issue will occur, and how many futures of promising young students will go unrealized because of the inability or unwillingness of local school districts to undertake this important measure. If Montgomery County, with its highly educated and very active parent body is struggling so much to get this done, I can’t imagine how difficult or nearly impossible it is for other districts in the State to accomplish this.

While youth aged birth to 18 years old comprise 20% of Montgomery County’s population, and approximately 22% of Maryland’s, they represent 100% of our collective future. By enacting SB 468 this body has the opportunity to establish guardrails to ensure that teens attend school when they are biologically available to learn and succeed. Within those guardrails, local districts can still maintain their autonomy in setting specific bell times for each of their student cohorts.

Thank you, in advance, for your favorable consideration of this bill.