

Good [morning/afternoon]]. My name is Ben Chico, and I am a lifelong Maryland resident and a psychology student at Loyola University Maryland. I am here today to voice my strong support for legislation mandating later school start times for middle and high school students.

Having attended school in Maryland my entire life, I experienced firsthand the negative effects of early school start times. I often struggled to stay awake in class, which made it harder to focus on my academics. This is not simply an issue of students staying up too late—it is a biological reality. Research has shown that during adolescence, circadian rhythms shift, causing teenagers to naturally stay up later. This shift, combined with early school start times, prevents students from getting the recommended minimum of around 9.2 hours of sleep per night.

Over time, students accumulate sleep debt throughout the week, leading them to "catch up" by sleeping in on weekends. However, just as skipping meals for several days cannot be undone with one large meal, sleep deprivation cannot be reversed with a couple of extra hours on the weekend. The consequences of insufficient sleep extend far beyond feeling tired in class. Chronic sleep deprivation has been linked to increased risks of cardiovascular disease, obesity, and declines in academic performance and overall well-being.

One of the biggest concerns for school districts is transportation logistics, but many solutions exist, including optimizing bus routes and utilizing alternative transportation methods. While these challenges require planning, they should not take precedence over the health and success of Maryland's students. At the end of the day, our priority should be to invest in the well-being and future of the next generation. Ensuring students get adequate sleep is a critical step in setting them up for academic and personal success. I strongly urge you to support this legislation.

Thank you for your time and consideration.