

Good afternoon, Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins, and esteemed members of the committee. My name is Chris Rider, and I am here today as a homeschooling parent in strong support of House Bill 1185, which seeks to grant homeschool students in Maryland the opportunity to participate in their local public school sports teams.

My family has a deep love for athletics. My wife and I have eight children—seven boys and one girl—who are incredibly active in sports, including baseball, basketball, wrestling, weight training, and football. Despite their dedication and talent, they are unfairly excluded from playing for our local public school teams, simply because we have chosen to homeschool.

Maryland's current policy restricts homeschool students from participating in public school athletics, even though our families contribute to the very system that funds these programs. Like every other Maryland taxpayer, we pay state and local taxes that support public education, yet our children are denied access to extracurricular activities, particularly sports. This exclusion is not only unfair but also detrimental to student-athletes who are eager to develop their skills, compete at a high level, and represent their communities.

Across the country, many states—including Florida, Pennsylvania, and Virginia—have recognized the value of allowing homeschool students to participate in public school sports. They understand that these students are part of the community and deserve the same opportunities as their peers. Unfortunately, Maryland has yet to follow suit, leaving thousands of capable, hardworking student-athletes without a pathway to compete in the sports they love.

Public school athletics offer structured training, experienced coaching, and competitive opportunities that are often unavailable to homeschool families. While club and recreational leagues exist, they do not provide the same level of development, exposure, or access to college recruitment opportunities as public school programs. By allowing homeschool students to participate, we are not asking for special treatment—only for fairness and inclusion in a system that we already help support.

Furthermore, participation in team sports fosters essential life skills—teamwork, discipline, leadership, and perseverance—that benefit all young people, regardless of their educational background. By denying homeschool students the opportunity to play, we are not only limiting their athletic potential but also restricting their personal growth and community engagement.

This bill presents a simple solution: allow homeschool students to try out for and, if qualified, join their local public school teams. This does not take opportunities away from public school students; rather, it ensures that all Maryland youth have an equal chance to compete and grow.

I urge this committee to support House Bill 1185 and ensure that homeschool students are no longer unfairly excluded from participating in public school athletics. Thank you for your time and consideration, and I respectfully request a favorable report on this bill.