

I would like to testify regarding HB583 - establishing virtual schools for students in Maryland.

My name is Yaroslava Yanevskyy, and I am currently a senior in high school. When I was in fourth grade, I began having seizures. After many, many trips to hospitals and meetings with the top doctors in the field, I found out I have rare drug resistant epilepsy. My seizures won't stop. This is not fun for me or anyone around me, but it is especially bad in a traditional school setting. When I attended school in person, I was having seizures every day. My mom would drop me off in the morning then keep her phone in her hand all day waiting for the school to call. If I made it through my first few classes, I would definitely have one at lunch. Loud noises are a trigger for my epilepsy, and school cafeterias are definitely loud. We spent years trying to adjust my 504 to make in person school safer for me, but after I had a seizure trying to walk down the stairs on my way to the health room, the school said they simply could not keep me safe. That fall alone left me with a concussion that kept me out of school completely for two weeks. It also really scared the security officer who witnessed it, the school nurse who tried to help me, and of course my family who really prefer me not dead. The school decided to shift me to half days in person and half days remote. Right as I was going to start that, covid hit and everyone went online full time. Online school was an absolute game changer for me. At home I can control my environment to reduce the triggers that cause my seizures. My seizure rate dropped to a few per week instead of a few per day. At home I could have a chair that supported me during seizures so I wasn't falling and getting hurt. I could keep all the surfaces around me padded in case I did manage to fall out of my chair, and I always had people with me to respond. My teachers no longer had to stop class to deal with my seizures, my peers no longer had to witness them, and I no longer felt like a freak. In online school, I am just a normal kid. I am just another student. If I have a seizure, my mom notifies my teacher in the chat and turns off my camera. I recover in my own safe bed then get up and go back to the next class. I miss less school, complete more work, and interact more with my teachers and classmates. I get almost all As and Bs and will graduate high school with a full year of college credits. I am a success story because of online education.

I am graduating this spring, but that doesn't mean I will stop fighting for online public education for students k-12 in Maryland. There are so many kids who, like me, thrive in the online setting. Whether it is because of epilepsy like mine or any other medical condition that makes in person learning impossible, these children should be able to access an education. Please pass this bill requiring each county board of education in Maryland to establish a virtual school for elementary, middle, and high school grade levels, with provisions for collaboration between county boards if a single board cannot create a virtual school independently.

Thank you.
Yaroslava Yanevskyy