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TESTIMONY OF SENATOR SHELLY HETTLEMAN

SB 845 - Local Education Agencies - Educator Screening - Educator Identification
Clearinghouse (School Personnel Vetting and Hiring Transparency Act)

SB 845, the School Personnel Vetting and Hiring Transparency Act, is a commonsense measure to enhance transparency, accountability, and safety in Maryland's schools by ensuring that all local education agencies (LEAs) utilize an Educator Identification Clearinghouse when hiring and vetting educators.

The urgent need for this legislation became painfully clear following recent events at Pikesville High School, where the former athletic director was charged with multiple serious offenses. While certainly not guaranteed, an additional layer of vetting, as enabled through this bill, could have raised red flags earlier in the hiring process (please see attached article from the Baltimore Banner). This failure of accountability could put students at serious risk and underscores the urgent need for stronger statewide vetting standards to prevent potential lapses within Maryland and across state lines.

We entrust teachers and school personnel with our most precious resource—our children. The individuals we place in classrooms across the state have a profound impact on students' development, well-being, and safety. Unfortunately, gaps in educator screening processes have allowed individuals with histories of misconduct to move between school systems undetected. We must close those gaps to ensure that only qualified, ethical, and responsible educators serve in our schools.

SB 845 strengthens the educator screening process statewide by requiring all LEAs to first become associate members of a national nonprofit membership organization that provides access to the Educator Identification Clearinghouse. Then they must utilize an Educator Identification Clearinghouse to screen all new applicants for educator positions in Maryland schools.

NASDTEC's Clearinghouse is one such trusted, nationwide database that allows states and school systems to share critical information about educators, including any certification revocations, disciplinary actions, or ethical violations that may not otherwise be disclosed in standard background checks. By requiring the use of such a clearinghouse tool, SB 845 ensures

that every Maryland school system has access to the most complete and up-to-date records before hiring or continuing employment.

This commonsense bill does not add burden to school districts. It raises potential red flags that require further investigation. SB 845 is about protecting students, supporting responsible hiring decisions, and upholding the integrity of Maryland's education system. A statewide approach to educator screening ensures that all school systems adopt best practices for vetting employees.

Every child deserves to learn in a safe and nurturing environment, and every parent deserves to know that those entrusted with their child's education have been thoroughly and properly vetted. SB 845 helps achieve that by providing another tool for administrators to use in their hiring process to add another element of security to prevent individuals with a history of misconduct from slipping through the cracks and harming students or school personnel.