

**Written Testimony Submitted for the Record to the Maryland House
Ways and Means Committee
For the Hearing on
Primary and Secondary Education – Virtual Schools – Alterations (HB583)
February 12, 2025**

Favorable

Free State PTA represents over 70,000 members across more than 500 public schools in Maryland, including families, students, teachers, administrators, and community leaders. As Maryland's largest child advocacy organization, we are committed to ensuring the educational success and well-being of all children.

We support House Bill 583, which would require each county board of education to establish a virtual school or collaborate with neighboring counties to offer one. This bill aligns with Free State PTA's core principles of promoting safe, supportive learning environments and ensuring equitable access to educational opportunities for all students.

Virtual learning is not suitable for every student, but for some, it is a vital pathway to success. For students facing challenges like bullying, anxiety, or other personal barriers, virtual schools offer a safe, supportive space where they can thrive. HB 583 ensures these students have access to a structured, synchronous virtual learning environment that fosters both academic achievement and mental well-being. This is particularly crucial for those who struggle in traditional settings but still deserve a rigorous and engaging education.

Additionally, HB 583 ensures that students who have no other options for education—whether due to personal challenges, geographical limitations, or other barriers—have a fundamental point of access to education through virtual learning. In requiring that each county provide access to a virtual school, this bill leverages the Blueprint for Maryland's Future minimum school funding model, ensuring that existing per-pupil allocations are used to support virtual learning without requiring additional state funding. This approach allows for equitable access to virtual education for students who need it most, ensuring that no child is left behind due to lack of options or resources.

Free State PTA believes HB 583 is a critical step toward providing all students with the opportunity to succeed in a learning environment that supports both their academic and mental health needs. We urge the committee to issue a favorable report on HB 583 to ensure all Maryland students can access the educational opportunities they deserve.

Testimony is presented on behalf of
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