

Maryland House of Delegates
House Ways and Means Committee
**HB 1180 Education – Primary and Secondary Schools – Alternative School Options
(Right to Learn Act)**
March 2, 2025
Oppose

Free State PTA is the largest child advocacy association in Maryland with over 500 Parent Teachers Associations statewide. Our PTA mission is to make every child's potential a reality by engaging and empowering families and communities to advocate for all children. To protect public schools from diverting public funding publicly educated students, amid other factors, Free State PTA opposes House Bill 1180 Education - Primary and Secondary Schools - Alternative School Options (Right to Learn Act).

While the tenor of a right to learn is a common goal, this bill fails to address the problem of why schools are failing, nor does it remediate the problems properly. The Maryland School Report Card indicates the number of stars provided to schools. The criteria that are assessed are academic achievement, academic progress, graduation rate for high schools, English proficiency, readiness for postsecondary success as well as school quality and student success.

Furthermore, alternative schools to which students at failing schools, those with a 2 or lower rating, have an option to attend include nonpublic schools. House Bill 1180 inappropriately authorizes the use of public tax dollars being siphoned off to nonpublic schools; schools that don't adhere to public accountability standards. Via the Broadening Options and Opportunities for Students Today (BOOST) Program, this bill would grant public tax dollars to be used as scholarships for student tuition at schools that allow employment discrimination, non-transparent discipline policies, no publicly available student or parent handbooks, and they lack free transportation in addition to not requiring teacher certifications. Nonpublic schools often cannot meet expectations and requirements that public schools must meet.

Currently, parents can employ school choice freedoms by sending their children to nonpublic schools at their own expense. While there is an immediate need to address failing schools now, the best way to approach it is by having parents willingly transfer their children at their own expense and simultaneously address the problem head on at the school level, even schools in jeopardy of obtaining a rating of 2. These problems of schools with such a rating take time to occur and don't happen overnight. Just because a school is failing, it doesn't necessarily mean that students are not learning. Perhaps the rating criteria for the Maryland School Report Card would be improved with the following changes to:

- Administrative or institutional leadership
- Teacher leadership
- Related to the school's culture (bullying, racism, violence, etc.)
- Strategic planning
- School's communications network
- Use of student performance data

We need to become more strategic about helping our low-performing schools by having parents, local school authorities and legislators identify failing schools at the earliest stages of decline. **It is for these reasons that Free State PTA urges an unfavorable vote on House Bill 1180.**

Sincerely,
Gerrod Tyler
President
Free State PTA