

Melissa Medwid

3939 Addison Woods Rd.

Frederick, MD 21704

medwidmelissa74@gmail.com

301-938-2890

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Dear Delegates Miller and Vogel,

I hope this letter finds you well. I am writing to express my strong support for legislative bill HB583, which proposes requiring every county to provide a virtual education option for elementary, middle, and high school students. As a parent who has three children flourishing in this setting, I believe this bill addresses several pressing issues in our education system and provides invaluable opportunities for students facing unique challenges.

One of the most pressing concerns HB583 seeks to address is the overcrowding and the distractions that often accompany traditional in-person schooling. Overcrowded classrooms can impede effective learning, leaving students struggling to receive the individualized attention they need. A seat in a virtual school will cost less than a seat in person since there is no overhead or maintenance associated with a building. Furthermore, a virtual education eliminates the expenses of additional staff and resources that would otherwise be required in-person. Virtual education offers a viable solution to this problem, allowing for smaller class sizes and more tailored learning experiences, ultimately ensuring that students can progress at their own pace without being hindered by the limitations of a physical classroom.

Additionally, HB583 offers crucial support for students with special needs, including those with Autism, ADHD, Anxiety, PTSD, and those who are medically fragile. Metrics show that 46.7% of students enrolled in RVP are eligible for Free and Reduced Priced Meals compared to 32.4%(5) in FCPS's general student body. Additionally, 36.1% in RVP are special needs students with IEP or 504 plans compared to 17.1%(5)(6) system-wide. These students often face significant barriers in a traditional school setting, such as sensory overload, difficulty focusing, or the need for specific accommodations that are not always readily available in a physical classroom. Virtual education presents an opportunity for these students to learn in a more comfortable and controlled environment, where they can access resources, receive individualized support, and work at a pace that suits their unique needs.

Furthermore, virtual education has been proven to be an effective tool for reducing stress and

anxiety for many students. For those dealing with mental health challenges, the traditional school environment can often exacerbate feelings of anxiety or overwhelm. By offering virtual learning, HB583 provides an alternative that reduces these pressures and supports students' well-being and emotional health.

As we navigate an evolving educational landscape, it is imperative that we create options that cater to the diverse needs of our student population. HB583 is a step in the right direction, providing a much-needed alternative that can help all students receive an equitable education, regardless of their unique challenges.

The following is my family's personal experience with virtual education. My three sons have engaged in virtual learning since 2020. My oldest now a Freshman in college, with a 4.0 GPA. He feels this would not have been possible if he had not switched to virtual learning. My tenth grader is a straight A student in the Frederick county virtual high school. He was unable to focus when he was an in person student because of the overcrowding and constant distractions. He was behind in his work and was unable to retain the material that was being taught.

My youngest is a sixth grader in the Remote Virtual Program. He has been a virtual learner since first grade. When he was in person he was dealing with anxiety from drills, fear of a shooting and a teacher that called him weak and small. He was suffering mentally and physically. He was diagnosed with Failure to Thrive and Severe Anxiety which were exacerbated by attending school in person school. He had frequent abdominal pain which led to weight loss and absenteeism. He was not learning. Since joining virtual school he has been testing above grade level on MCAPs, DIBELS and IReady. He is an honor roll student and received the President Outstanding Academic Excellence Award. He is happy and healthy and if he returns to in person school his pediatrician as well as myself feel his progress will be lost. In person learning does not work for some children and those children have a right to an equitable education which means a virtual, synchronous option. Thank you for your time and consideration.

I urge you to lend your full support to HB583 and ensure its passage. By doing so, you will be helping to create a more inclusive, accessible, and effective education system for students across the state.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to your support of this important bill.

Sincerely,

Melissa Medwid