



TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE OF DELEGATES WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE

HB 1180 Education – Primary and Secondary Schools – Alternative School Options (Right to Learn Act)

POSITION: UNFAVORABLE

By: Linda T. Kohn, President

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The League of Women Voters of Maryland (LWVMD) is a nonpartisan organization that supports policies that provide an equitable, adequate, and quality education for all children. LWVMD opposes using public funding for vouchers to enable parents to send their children to private elementary and secondary schools. It supports state funding to all public elementary and secondary schools at a level high enough to eliminate inequities. LWVMD requests an **unfavorable report on HB 1180, Alternative School Options (Right to Learn Act)**, because this bill will shift funds away from public schools instead of funds being used to improve public schools.

HB 1180 proposes providing students attending public schools that receive a one star rating for three consecutive school years be provided alternative options, including the option to attend nonpublic schools. The state's "star rating system" awards a 1- 5 star score to each public school in Maryland based on a number of indicators. Schools identified as low-performing under this system receive supports and interventions to help them improve.

In addition, HB 1180 creates "Right to Learn" scholarships to cover non-public school tuition. This takes resources away from the poorly performing public school. Rather than offering scholarships to cover the cost of attending non-public schools, continuing to target resources on decreasing the number of one-star schools would better serve all students.

The number of one-star schools has been decreasing over the last few years, from 39 schools in 2021-22 to just 13 in 2023-24, as shown in the chart below. Continuing to build on the momentum of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future funding benefiting all

students would be better than reallocating resources to nonpublic schools benefiting a few students.

School Year	Count of One Star Schools	Total Maryland Schools Rated
2021-2022	39	1,311
2022-2023	25	1,310
2023-2024	13	1,312

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Nonpublic schools are not held to the same standards as public schools and are not mandated to educate all students. Public funding for schools should be a resource for all students, not reallocated to selected students able to meet the nonpublic school standards for admission. In addition, nonpublic schools are not subject to the state's star rating system, so comparisons of academic quality or ability to improve student performance are not possible.

The League of Women Voters of Maryland, representing 1,000+ citizens throughout Maryland, **strongly urges you to issue a UNFAVABLE report.**

*Source: Maryland State Department of Education.

<https://www.marylandpublicschools.org/stateboard/Documents/2023/1205/Maryland-School-Report-Card-Results-SY-2022-2023-A11Y.pdf>

<https://www.marylandpublicschools.org/stateboard/Documents/2024/1203/Maryland-School-Report-Card-A.pdf>