



MARYLAND | MONTGOMERY COUNTY
health, safety and equity in education

Testimony of Sandra S. Landis, Montgomery County Chapter Leader

Start School Later on HB 1015

February 24, 2025

Good Afternoon, Members of the Maryland General Assembly and Attendees,

Thank you so much for the privilege of appearing before you today to speak about SB 468 – Public, Middle, High and Charter Schools Start Time for Instruction. My name is Sandra Landis, and I am the [Montgomery County Chapter Leader of Start School Later](#), a national organization dedicated to ensuring school start times compatible with health, safety, education and equity. I simultaneously serve as Bell Time Subcommittee Chair of the Montgomery County Council of PTAs. Both roles work synergistically to underscore the single mission focus of safe and healthy bell times for secondary school students.

This body led the Nation with the first of its kind legislative recognition of the need for healthy and safe school hours. Nearly a decade ago, when she was a Montgomery County delegate, our current Lt. Governor, sponsored the [Orange Ribbon Bill for Healthy School Hours](#) bill, which established a voluntary incentive program to encourage school districts to implement healthy school hours. This distinguished body then stepped in again in 2021 to enact HB 72, which allows school systems to use alternative vehicles to

transport students. Such flexibility in transportation leads to increased options and potentially lower costs for transporting students than relying on more restrictive transportation choices. Yet despite these two pieces of legislation that support safe and healthy teenage bell times in Maryland, most of our public schools in the State are not complying with healthy school start times recommended by nearly every medical group in the country, including the [U.S. Surgeon General](#), [American Academy of Pediatrics](#), and [Centers for Disease Control](#).

Studies show that teenagers need 8 – 10 hours of sleep, yet their onset of sleep is metabolically delayed until approximately 11 pm. Compounding this sleep deficit is the fact that current bell times require our teens to be awakened for school during the most critical time of their sleep cycles, which occurs toward its end, when higher level brain functions develop including reasoning, problem solving and good judgement. Hence, local school districts' operational decisions interfere with our students' ability to develop the very critical thinking skills we want them to have to access the curriculum, and to succeed in school and in their lives.

Adolescents who get insufficient or poor quality sleep are more likely to report symptoms of depression, hopelessness, suicidal thoughts and attempts, irritability and impaired emotional regulation. If this isn't concerning enough, sleep deprivation is linked to the two leading causes of death in adolescents: accidents (namely, [car crashes](#)) and [suicide](#) (Tefft, 2018; Lee et al., 2012). Bell times that are too early are associated with aggression and gun violence. Sadly, these latter findings track to Montgomery County's experience between 2019 and 2024, where juvenile crime increased

95%. Positive impacts of delaying bell times to the medically recommended start times include the following:

- An NIH study released several years ago showed that every one hour of increased sleep among teens led to a [decreased risk of suicide by 11%](#)
- A population study showed that teens who obtained less than 7 hours of sleep during adolescence [developed multiple sclerosis at higher rates](#) than their peers who slept more.
- A study of high schools with varying start times showed that [every ten minutes made a difference in obesity rates](#).
- A study of a New York high school that moved 45 minutes later found [significant changes in student discipline](#).
- [Graduation rates increased 9%](#) in schools that implemented later bell times.

In his recent State of the State speech Governor Moore indicated that “we need to invest in our greatest strength as Marylanders: And that’s our people.” He further indicated that his goals for the state require “ensuring that Maryland has the best public schools in the United States of America. Our schools are the foundation on which we build everything else.” In order to make Governor Moore’s vision a reality throughout the State, we need to ensure that school start times that are too early are not only causing our teenagers to fall short of their academic promise, but to actually suffer long term adverse health impacts. By enacting HB 1015, the third critical piece of legislation in this bell time legislative trilogy, this body has the opportunity to reverse the negative impact of too early start times and to allow our teens to attend school when they are biologically available to learn and succeed. We understand that some school districts might claim to want to express “local control” over this issue – however, I’d like to point out that HB 1015 provides them local control.

With local control comes responsibility, and for the past decade many have not set healthy sleep safety guardrails, which is why this legislation continues to be warranted. This legislation provides those guardrails. We encourage you to enact it for the benefit of our students, and to allow Maryland to grow into the vision we and our Governor see for our future.