

Mr. Chair, Madam Vice-Chair, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Jennifer Kraft, and I am writing in support of Senator Gile's Senate Bill 685.

I am the mother of twin boys who were students of the third-grade teacher involved in the 2023 sexual abuse allegation at Severna Park Elementary School. In March of that year, I received an email stating that their teacher would be out of school indefinitely for personal reasons. Later, through another parent, I learned that he had been removed due to allegations of sexual abuse involving his students.

I was instantly overwhelmed by a range of emotions: shock and disbelief that I did not know the real reason he was gone, panic that my children might be affected, and confusion, frustration, and anger at the lack of information. I had so many unanswered questions, and I had no idea how to respond to the questions from my boys or where to turn for help. I reached out to the school, hoping for clarity, but quickly realized that they would not be able to provide the answers or guidance I needed.

The days that followed were filled with the same emotions as I navigated this new territory. No one was prepared for the firestorm that followed—not the students, not the teachers, not the parents, and not the administrators. What families experienced was a lack of transparency, communication, and accountability.

When I first read Senate Bill 685, my initial feeling was relief.

It was a relief to see legislation that thoughtfully and thoroughly acknowledges and addresses the issues that families faced during that time. We prepare our schools for emergencies like fires and lockdowns. This incident was also an emergency—one that required a plan with clarity, structure, and communication.

Senate Bill 685 provides families and schools with a consistent framework to navigate these emergencies. It addresses the questions that flooded my mind in those first moments of panic. It also goes further by requiring an after-action review—asking not only what happened, but how it happened and how it can be prevented in the future.

This bill aligns schools and families as partners in protecting children. It provides parents with the knowledge and resources necessary to navigate extraordinarily difficult situations with confidence instead of fear.

It is still hard for me to think about those days in 2023. But it is reassuring to know that future families do not have to experience the same silence and uncertainty as I did.

I respectfully urge you to vote yes on Senate Bill 685 and provide that relief to other families across Maryland.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,  
Jennifer Kraft