

Good afternoon. My name is Jennifer April and I am a financial professional and the parent of two high school students, a freshman and a senior, both at Stephen Decatur High School in Worcester County, Maryland. I appreciate the opportunity to provide my written testimony in support of and to request a favorable report for SB 903 – the Maryland Public Education Parental Partnership Act.

As a single parent for my children's entire lives, I know too well the statement - "it takes a village." The balance of working full-time as the sole-provider for my family while also being a full-time mom was somewhat of a challenge; however it was the most rewarding challenge of my life. At times, I would rely on the support of family members, friends, coaches and teachers to fill in for me when I was unable to meet a parental requirement on my own. This allowed for planning, coordination, and communication between all parties for one common goal – a positive experience for one or both of my children. It was a labor of love and I continue to welcome each challenge that comes along in raising my children and am grateful for each person who has helped to overcome them along the way.

I am proud to say that I was an active participant in every athletic, social, religious and educational milestone for my children – from volunteering at the book fair, helping with a science project, learning drills to run a recreational league basketball practice or even building a pine wood derby car; I was there and accomplished each with my village of support. In the same way I was supported by my "village," this bill seeks to foster a connection between educators and parents for the advancement of our youth in every stage of their development. As my presence in school and extracurricular activities gave my children an increased sense of confidence, this bill focuses on doing that same thing for the students of Maryland. Children who feel heard and supported can develop further, deepen their motivation and experience further success.

The partnership that this bill is pursuing gives an opportunity for parents to participate in education choices. It would foster collaboration and empower a healthy relationship between the institution and the family. The dynamic would build trust on both sides, encourage a relationship and give a deeper sense of openness. It would also allow a meaningful dialogue between the parties about important and sometimes sensitive topics that arise throughout a child's development. Parents who are active in educational decisions can provide valuable feedback as their direct role and relationship may provide a different viewpoint for consideration in a school setting. In addition to that, parents who are consistently present on school campuses build trust, provide encouragement and expand the circle of support for the student population.

As a parent my primary goal has been the success and well-being of my children. I have always taken on that same feeling for all classmates and teammates when I volunteered for roles within the classroom or within the community including homeroom mom, team mom and coach. I always sought to provide high encouragement and a positive outlook on my children and the student body I interacted with when in a role model position. Parents are innately committed to the long-term success of their offspring and an opportunity to enhance that by building on the foundation and steppingstones of education is a pathway to positive success for all parties.

I respectfully respect your consideration of a favorable report for SB 903 to actively expand the “village” for our youth and welcome parents into the partnership of educational success.