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MAJORITY WHIP

Budget and Taxation Committee

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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony of Senator Joanne C. Benson

SB0103-Public Middle, High, and Charter Schools-Start Time Later for Instruction

Good afternoon, Chair Feldman, and Vice Chair Kagan, and the esteemed members of Education, Energy, and Environment Committee

I appreciate the opportunity to present SB0103. The bill addresses a well-documented issue facing Maryland's middle and high school students: chronic sleep deprivation and its impact on health, and academic performance.

Science is consistent. Adolescents experience a biological shift in sleep cycles that makes early start times harmful. When school begins too early, students are not just tired. They are less attentive, more anxious, and more likely to struggle academically and emotionally.

This requires that, beginning in the 2028-2029 school year, middle school start no earlier than 8:00 a.m. and high school no earlier than 8:30 a.m., with a waiver process for compelling circumstances. It also requires local school systems to engage families and communities through a public information campaign, so implementation is thoughtful and transparent.

This legislation reflects lessons learned from last session. It provides a long planning runway, preserves local flexibility in how districts implement the change, and recognizes that student health should not depend on ZIP code.

Concerns about transportation, athletics, and family routine are real, but they are manageable. Districts across the county have made these transitions successful, and numerous reports improved attendance, engagement, and school climate.

SB0103 is not about convenience. It is about aligning school schedules with what we know works for students.

Thus, I respectfully urge the committee to make a favorable report on SB0103.

Thank you