

Testimony in Opposition to SB0015F – Accountability Concerns

Position: UNFAVORABLE

Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee,

My name is Tom Henry, and I am writing to formally express my opposition to SB0015 and its cross-file, HB0089.

While these bills are presented as expanding oversight of Baltimore County Public Schools (BCPS), they do not create meaningful accountability and instead establish a delayed and optional framework that risks misleading the public into believing reform has occurred when it has not.

First, the legislation delays and weakens oversight.

HB 89/SB0015F does not mandate oversight of BCPS by the Baltimore County Office of the Inspector General (OIG). Instead, they provide that beginning in 2027, the Baltimore County Council **may** enact a local law extending the OIG's authority to the school system. This language **makes oversight discretionary rather than guaranteed**. If independent review of BCPS is necessary, postponing action and leaving it to future political will undermines the urgency and seriousness of the issue.

Second, the structure of the OIG does not provide enforcement authority.

Even if the County Council later grants the OIG jurisdiction over BCPS, the Inspector General's role remains investigative and advisory. The OIG can review records, conduct investigations, issue reports, and refer findings to appropriate authorities. However, the office cannot prosecute, impose discipline, remove officials, or compel corrective action on its own. Accountability therefore depends entirely on other bodies choosing to act. Oversight that ends with a report and referral, without guaranteed enforcement mechanisms, does not ensure consequences.

Third, Baltimore County's history demonstrates the vulnerability of watchdog oversight.

The experience surrounding the tenure and departure of former Inspector General Kelly Madigan highlighted the political tensions that can arise when oversight functions challenge established interests. That history raises concerns about whether expanded authority, without additional structural protections and independence, will produce effective reform or merely extend existing conflicts.

Finally, the bill risks creating the appearance of reform without delivering results.

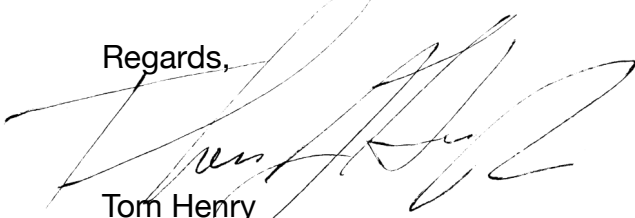
Taxpayers and families expect transparency, integrity, and responsible stewardship of public resources. Legislation that delays action, makes oversight optional, and does not strengthen enforcement may provide a public relations talking point, but it does not ensure accountability in practice.

If the General Assembly intends to strengthen oversight of BCPS, a more effective approach would be to establish mandatory, immediate authority, coupled with clear independence safeguards and mechanisms that ensure investigative findings lead to meaningful action.

For these reasons, and until the Baltimore County OIGs role is strengthened, I urge the committee to issue an unfavorable report on SB0015F.

Thank you for your consideration.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tom Henry', is written over the 'Regards,' text.

Tom Henry
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