

SUPERINTENDENT J SCOTT SMITH ORAL TESTIMONY

Good afternoon, I am Scott Smith, Superintendent of St. Mary's County Public Schools. I come before you today to voice support for HB479 from all three Southern Maryland Superintendents, Dr. Navarro in Charles County, and Dr. Newsome in Calvert.

In education, nothing is more valuable, more impactful than the classroom teacher - and we don't have enough. In St. Mary's County, in Calvert, in Charles, we superintendents have come to the unshakable conclusion that the solution to this crisis must come from us - we must grow our own.

We must build a regional, accessible, affordable pathway, free of barriers, that moves our ***students today*** to become our ***teachers tomorrow***.

We also know that locally grown teachers are deeply connected to the community; they know our students, our schools, our staff... and importantly, once they join us, they stay.

In St. Mary's County, we are already taking steps to make this happen. This year, our Teacher Academy of Maryland students, who have completed the program requirements by the end of their junior year, enter "directed study" and can enroll in an Early College Pathway at the College of Southern Maryland. When they finish their senior year, they will have earned 26 college credits and be able to earn an Associate in the Arts of Teaching (AAT) within a year of leaving high school.

They will have an affordable, solid start on their path to the classroom - all while staying in the Southern Maryland region. I urge you to read the testimony submitted by two students in this program, **Riley Day** and **Lauren Sebring**, as their path is what we hope to replicate and expand across our three school systems.

While we can create a pathway to get them to an AAT, we need to work on what comes next. How can we keep them in Southern Maryland when there is no local in-person option to earn their bachelor's degree?

This is where a work group bringing all stakeholders together can create something new, something that harnesses the technology of the 21st-century, without losing the human, in-person, face-to-face community that is the bedrock of education.

I know that with the right people around the table, we can pioneer a local teacher preparation pathway that will be a model for the state.

This is why we support SB529.