

Chair Wells and Members of the Government, Labor, and Elections Committee,

My name is Fanta Bah, and I am an 11th grade high school student in Montgomery County, Maryland. I am writing in strong support of House Bill 649, "Advancing Equal Educational Opportunities for All Students in Maryland."

As a student, I see firsthand how unequal access to resources can shape a person's education. Not every school in Maryland has the same funding, support staff, technology, or academic opportunities. Some students have access to advanced classes, updated materials, mental health support, and extracurricular programs; while others are limited simply because of where they live. That is not a reflection of ability or effort. It is a reflection of systemic inequality.

The average median household income in Montgomery County ranges from \$132,000-\$140,800. The average median household income in Prince George's County ranges from \$100,700-\$101,800. Montgomery County Schools Rank #2 Best School District in Maryland with an average "A" grade. Prince George's County Ranks #23 with a "C" grade. This shows a direct correlation between income and educational opportunity in Maryland.

Education is supposed to be the foundation for opportunity for all students. When schools underfund or lack essential support services or discriminate against students because of their backgrounds, students fall behind and it's not their fault. This especially impacts students from low-income communities, students with disabilities, and students who need additional academic or emotional support. Equal opportunity does not mean giving every student the same thing; it means ensuring every student has what they need to succeed.

This bill is important because it acknowledges that fairness in education requires action. By working to make sure that all students have equal access to all school programs and activities, Maryland can move closer to a system where a student's background does not stand in the way of success. Making sure that all students have the same opportunities is not just about schools, but it is about the future workforce, stronger communities, and long-term economic stability for our state.