

My name is Caitlin Snodgrass, I am a resident of Hagerstown, Maryland and I support this bill. A few years ago I was given the opportunity to care for a homeless boy age 7- it was late September and he was not enrolled in school. As a complete stranger I was able to reenroll him thanks to the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act which provides expanded rights and resources to homeless students. After enrolling the boy I asked the school why no reports were being made to DSS regarding educational neglect- that is when I was informed that DSS doesn't take reports on truancy.

I took the boy to a well-child visit and shared other concerns with the pediatrician who submitted a report to Washington County DSS. DSS declined to investigate, stating "the mother is meeting all of the child's needs by allowing you to care for him. We think it's worth you having a conversation with the mother regarding these concerns".

Upon doing so, the mother removed the child from my care and he became code w50 for the second time in his life at only 7yrs old- he proceeded to miss the next three school years.

I tracked him through 3 states for 2.5yrs, constantly working with authorities trying to save him. I found him in a drug house at one point and paid a drug addict 50\$ to let me take him for a day. I eventually succeeded in having him taken into MD state custody where he remains to this day. Please note, he was not removed for truancy. When children, especially young children, are without access to education they're likely experiencing other forms of neglect and abuse.

Through this experience I learned that Maryland has THOUSANDS of unaccounted children in the public school system. Schools are unable to confirm the welfare of every code50 child so I urge you to also consider an amendment to the Maryland Student Records System Manual requiring schools to contact law enforcement and request BOLOs for the guardians for the purpose of locating the child. Again, only for instances where the child welfare can't be confirmed- DSS won't be able to find these kids but police can issue a nationwide bolo which is the most efficient and effective way to get eyes on the child.

When I met that boy one of the first things he told me was, "Ms.Caitlin, I've never been to 2nd grade but I'd really like to go"- these kids WANT to be in school because they get to EAT. School can save kids' lives.

Our code50 data reveals a crisis of epic proportions but the public is completely unaware of this issue because MSDE HIDES over half of this data from taxpayers by excluding it from the yearly attendance report. It feels Maryland has designed a system allowing kids to easily fall off the radar of public schools with minimal effort to return them to the classroom. Many of these kids end up dead and many more are missing years of vital schooling yet we still expect them to grow up and become law abiding citizens. It feels like we are purposely failing these children- so I beg you to vote yes and make Maryland the 25th state to codify educational neglect.