

**Prepared Testimony of Taylor A. Blake
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Before the House Committee on Ways and Means
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House Bill 1043 Homeschool Students in Maryland – Right to Play

Chair Wilkins, Vice Chair Feldmark, and members of the Ways and Means Committee

My name is Taylor Blake, and I am a junior at St. Mary's College of Maryland (SMCM), writing to you in favor of House Bill 1043. My support for this bill goes beyond the clear and apparent value it offers Maryland's non-traditional students, but is also personal in nature. As a formerly homeschooled student, whose homeschooling spanned K-12, I know first hand the impact this legislation would make.

For 16 years my core instruction was curated by my parents' and their choice of curriculum, local community organizations, and extracurricular co-ops designed for homeschooled students. It's important to mention that my parents' decision to homeschool me was in response to my needs as a student. Upon entering preschool, I was reading 3 grade levels above. This made it challenging to keep me academically stimulated. My parents requested I be tested to determine if joining the class above me would be more suitable to which they were denied. I also experienced challenges in the classroom relating to other students. This created a lethal mix in which that specific environment no longer served me.

When my parents chose to meet my individual needs as a student I excelled. By the end of my high school career I had a 3.8 GPA, took several college courses through dual enrollment and received multiple merit scholarships to four year institutions. But even prior to high school my parents were able to offer me a rigorous course load while I participated in many enriching extra curricular activities like art classes, theater courses, culinary classes, sewing classes, mock trial, speech and debate and a youth orchestra. However, when I had a desire to explore sports like volleyball or softball, my parents found it incredibly difficult to get me involved. This is because Maryland is one of the 20 states that bar homeschool students from participating in interscholastic athletic activities without being enrolled in a public school. (CRHE 2021)

There are several reasons why this practice is not only illogical but discriminatory, and Maryland should abandon it.

First, parents who elect to home school their children are not offered tax incentives or exemptions, meaning they are still paying for and funding their local public schools and subsequently the athletic programs. It seems that Maryland believes regardless of financial contributions to the public school system and by extension the athletics program that Maryland's homeschooling families should reap none of the benefits of their investment

Secondly, Maryland homeschooled students make up a crucial part of Maryland's future, and should not be an afterthought. As of 2021 homeschooled students made up close to 5% of the state's K-12 student population, or about 40,000 students.(MDHSA 2021). That is a significant number of students who may never get the chance to run track, or wrestle, or play soccer and have their talents recognized. As I have already mentioned there are various reasons why a parent may elect to homeschool their student. Despite the variance, the underlying goal is to provide the best education for that individual student. Allowing homeschooled students the right to play shows that Maryland is invested in the success of its homeschooled students.

Third, youth sports are vital to physical education, which many parents rely on interscholastic athletics to provide. According to the National Athletics Trainers Association, students who participate in youth sports have a lower risk of illnesses like heart disease, and diabetes (University of San Diego 2023) By barring homeschooled students from participating in interscholastic athletics the state of Maryland stands directly in between the furtherance of students' physical education, and their ability to explore their interests.

Finally, when looking at the fiscal note it is clear that there are no negative financial or institutional impacts that can be associated with giving Maryland's homeschooled students the right to play.

In conclusion, this bill creates a thorough framework for Maryland's homeschooled students to have access to the resources and programs their parents pay for. Furthermore, it clarifies that Maryland values the health and education and success of all of its students, not just a select few. While my childhood dreams of athletic stardom may not have been realized, there is still time for this committee to give and ensure the next generation of homeschooled students their right to play. For these reasons I urge the committee to favorably consider HB104. Thank you.

Sources:

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