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## **Testimony in Support of House Bill 0026 (HB0026)**

Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Ways and Means Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony today in strong support of **House Bill 0026**, which would authorize county boards of education to adopt open enrollment policies allowing students to attend a public school in a county other than the one where they live, free of charge, subject to clear, equitable procedures.

### **Expanding Access and Expanding Opportunity**

This bill would help dismantle the deeply entrenched connection between a child's ZIP code and their school access — a link that too often determines educational quality and opportunity in Maryland. When families can only enroll in the school to which they are assigned, regardless of fit or needs, many students remain in underperforming environments or fall through the cracks. Open enrollment gives families a voice and options within the public system itself — not outside of it.

### **Keeping Public Schools Available to All**

Organizations like Available to All emphasize that public education should be a fully accessible public good — not segmented by geography, wealth, or circumstance. Open enrollment models do exactly that: they expand access without privatizing education or diverting public funds away from traditional public schools. By allowing families to choose within the public sector, HB0026 strengthens accountability and responsiveness across the system.

### **Supporting Equity, Not Inequality**

The National Parents Union's "Closing the Promise Gap" framework highlights a critical contrast in education policy: **public school choice, like open enrollment, can increase equity for all families**, whereas tuition-based vouchers or Education Savings Accounts often create two tiers of access, privileging those who can pay and leaving others behind. HB0026 keeps choice squarely within the public realm — no tuition, no separate system, and no economic gatekeeping — ensuring that all students can benefit.

### **Key Provisions That Promote Fairness**

HB0026 thoughtfully incorporates safeguards to ensure implementation is fair and transparent:

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- Boards must publish open enrollment capacity by school and grade level and update that data regularly so families can plan and choose with confidence.
- Application processes must be accessible — available in electronic and hard copy form — with clear timelines and notifications of decisions.
- Enrollment decisions may be subject to equitable selection methods, such as lotteries, if demand exceeds capacity.
- Enrollment pursuant to this policy counts for full-time equivalent funding for the receiving county, ensuring resources follow students and incentivizing districts to participate.

These provisions help ensure open enrollment is not a burdensome administrative experiment, but a well-structured opportunity that respects both family choice and school integrity.

### **Real Schools, Real Teachers, Real Families**

HB0026 ensures that open enrollment does not require schools to redesign programs or offer services they do not already provide, and it preserves existing eligibility criteria for specialized programs so that quality and safety remain paramount. It also allows districts to make thoughtful decisions about capacity, student needs, and available resources.

### **Conclusion**

Maryland's public education system is stronger when families can choose the best fit for their children. HB0026 is a commonsense, equity-centered policy that expands access within our public schools, honors local control, and ensures transparency and fairness for families and districts alike.

I respectfully urge the committee to vote in favor of **House Bill 0026**.

Thank you.

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