

Dear Delegates,

I am writing in support of HB1174.

I have a senior and a 7th grader in HCPSS.

Nearly a decade ago ago, several community groups within Howard County came together to convince HCPSS to recognize major non-Christian holidays to reflect the diversity of Howard County families. Fortunately, the BOE members at the time were in favor of recognizing these holidays and encouraged the inclusion of these holidays in the school calendar as school closures, whether system-wide or students only.

Last year, at the beginning of Ramadan, HCPSS central office staff proposed using a school closure to make up a snow day. The BOE had a brief discussion and agreed. However, there was no discussion about the fact that the day had been marked as a school closure in recognition of Eid al-Fitr or about the impact to Muslim students, families, and staff. While I assume no malice on the part of central office staff, the Superintendent, or the BOE, the harm to the community was felt during their holiest month, making the impact that much more painful.

After years of advocacy and volunteering in our schools, as a PTA President, on HCPSS's Community Advisory Committee, this felt like a complete erasure of our religious and cultural identity by the school system. My children would face the same awful choices I faced growing up in Maryland, where I had to decide whether or not it was worth having to make up exams, quizzes, and/or homework in order to celebrate one of two major religious holidays with my family and friends.

It's imperative that the Howard County delegation put in place the guardrails HB1174 provides in order to prevent further harm to our diverse communities. My observation is that HCPSS and the BOE are guided first and foremost by compliance. Accordingly, the most effective way to ensure adherence by HCPSS is to codify the holidays and take the guesswork out of the process.

The school system, the BOE, and elected officials across the county tout the diversity of our communities as something to celebrate. That celebration, however, needs to move beyond statements and into real action in recognizing and respecting the communities, students, and staff.

I would be in favor of an amendment to add Holi to the list of holidays proposed for closure for student attendance for greater inclusion of Hindu students, their families, and staff.

Thank you for your time and consideration. And I hope that you will vote in favor of celebrating diversity.

Thank you,
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