

Letter of Support for HB531

Dear Chair Wilkins and Esteemed Members of the Committee,

We are team 19458, Equilibrium.exe. We participate in an international competition, First Tech Challenge, otherwise known as FTC. FIRST stands for “For Inspiration and Recognition of STEM and Technology,” and is the non-profit organization that strives to “inspire young people to be science and technology leaders and innovators, by engaging them in exciting mentor-based programs that build science, engineering, and technology skills, that inspire innovation, and that foster well-rounded life capabilities including self-confidence, communication, and leadership.” Our sport is like any other sport, where we learn teamwork and have a competitive season playing matches against other teams. The key difference is that FIRST is the only sport where every student can go pro.

FIRST uniquely provides opportunities for students to improve both technical skills and leadership by tackling problems in the real-world. Robotics takes STEM education beyond the theoretical learning provided in classrooms and pushes students to apply their knowledge to design, build, test, fail, and improve. More than a grade or credit, FIRST motivates students through teamwork, competition, and purpose, turning learning into meaningful impact. Through the iterative engineering process, we develop resilience, time management, communication, and accountability. We collaborate with diverse teammates, learn from industry mentors, and present our ideas with confidence.

Beyond building robots, FIRST inspires us to lead in our communities. Through mentoring younger teams, hosting STEM nights, running summer camps, and advocating for expanded access, we work to lower barriers to entry and create opportunity for all students. FIRST doesn’t just build robots: it builds leaders who strengthen their communities and expand access to STEM across Maryland.

On behalf of our Maryland FIRST Robotics team, we strongly support the establishment of the Public Schools STEM and Robotics Program Task Force. Our outreach initiatives focusing on spreading FIRST programs have led us to see the barriers that many Maryland students experience firsthand. While many FTC teams like ours work to address these issues, a formalized bill dedicating a taskforce would create a more cohesive, backed, and effective effort.

Establishing this Task Force is an important step toward ensuring that all Maryland students, regardless of zip code, have access to high-quality STEM and robotics programs. By studying funding models, program structures, and statewide implementation strategies, this bill promotes sustainable growth and accountability while strengthening Maryland’s pipeline of innovators and problem-solvers. We believe this legislation will help expand equitable STEM opportunities across the state and inspire the next generation of engineers, entrepreneurs, and community leaders.

Sincerely,
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