

Margaret Hopwood

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7560 Greenwood Drive
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Respected House Delegates and Elected Officials:

First and foremost, let me say thank you for the opportunity to give my testimony on this bill today. I would also like to take the opportunity to thank you for your service to our local government and local communities; your dedication does not go unnoticed.

I'm a Howard County graduate. I graduated from River Hill High School in 2008. My name then was Margaret McCarthy. Me and my four siblings all went to River Hill School for 4 years and had an amazing experience. Three of my siblings and I all played sports at River Hill, I played both field hockey and basketball for all 4 years. My twin brother also played basketball, and we both won state championships in our time as "Hawk". I then went on to play college basketball, I played JUCO Basketball in th NJCAA at Anne Arundel community Colleges where my team finished sixth in the nation. After college I coached basketball at reservoir high school as the JV Girls Basketball assistant coach in 2011. My husband, Karriem Hopwood (then Karriem Shah) is a 1999 graduate of Wilde Lake High School. He played football and lacrosse in his years at Wilde Lake.

I still weightlift and play sports to this day. Being an athlete has been an integral part of my life and helped shape the person who I am today.

I hold the opinion, and I hope that you will agree, that all students should have the ability to play sports for the team and the community in which they live. As a Howard County resident, my

husband and I pay a significant property tax towards the education system that we are currently not using. We elected to withdraw my eldest from Pointers Run Elementary because she was having, significant, anxiety upon entering the public school system. As I often put it when explaining to strangers: A lot of very smart people take their own lives everyday as young adults or teens because they felt like no one listened to them when they were struggling for the majority of their life... and that will not be my child.

Our children play multiple sports including soccer, basketball, All-Star cheerleading, dance, and tennis. However, the public school system is not built for all students to thrive emotionally and educationally. It's not necessarily the fault of the public school system, but some students do better learning in an environment with less people and in a structure that allows them to be more free throughout their day and not have to sit for 8 hours a day and learn... for some children that simply is not conducive to learning, for some it is actually counter productive, or for their mental health... and that was the case with our children and is ultimately what led us to withdrawing from the public school system.

That said, sports, and athletics in general, have a way of bringing all people together. These children are still very much a part of the communities in which they live. Regardless of whether they go to the public schools or not: They are friends. They are neighbors. They are family, in many cases.

When a parent elects to withdraw their student from the public school system, it is not always because of the school itself, or the people, or what they are learning. Sometimes, it is simply about their own child and what is best to help them be able to learn and grow. I think that, for the people who want their children to be able to participate in public school sports, this is often the case. Children and parents should not be punished for doing what helps them learn best. Sports can change your entire life. A student who does not learn well in that system, or has anxiety at the schools, or is feeling alone or suicidal should not be told that they have to attend the public school simply because they want to play basketball, or soccer, or volleyball etc. In many cases, these sports are the only outlet that a student has and it can have a significant impact on mental

health. Additionally, per NCAA rules, it is very difficult for a homeschooled student to be considered eligible play at the college level, especially if they require a scholarship to do so.

There are many instances in which a very bright student does not do well in the public school system, as a homeschooling parent I have witnessed this dozens of times ... but these same children can and do thrive academically as a homeschooled child. These are KIDS they should not be forced to attend a public school just to play sports.

Certainly, there are instances where parents elect to homeschool for reasons that are not tied to physical, emotional, or mental health... But still their children are children and if they want to play sports at the public school, I do not think we should be punishing the children for the parents decisions... and the fact remains that if a parent is living in Howard County, they are paying Howard County property taxes which are going to the school system in a large amount.

Children should be able to participate in sports if they live in the district, because they are a part of that community. As a parent in my household, we pay over \$7,000 a year to the public school, that is the portion of our property tax bill directed to Howard County public schools. I am paying \$7,000 a year so that someone else's child can use these facilities in Howard County and have the excellent school that Howard County is known for without putting any strain on the system, as my children are at home, because that is where they learn best.

That said, my children's friends all attend the local schools and while my kids have no interest in going back to the public elementary school, I'm sure if given the opportunity they would love to try out for the sports teams when the time comes; I do not think it's fair for any child to not be able to play on these teams.

I hope that you will consider passing this bill today and ultimately signing it into law so that all children can have the opportunity to play sports and enjoy Athletics in the way that I did growing up and still do today.

Best regards,

Margaret Hopwood