

Written Testimony in Support of HB 486
Thomas S. Stone Elementary School PTO
Mount Rainier, Maryland
Cross-filed with: SB0526

To the Honorable Members of the Committee,

My name is Kameka Harris, and I am the President of the Thomas S. Stone Elementary School PTO in Mount Rainier, Maryland. I am writing in strong support of House Bill 486.

In 1960, at just six years old, Ruby Bridges demonstrated unparalleled bravery by walking into an all-white elementary school in New Orleans, helping to change the face of education in America. By passing this bill, Maryland will ensure that her story is not just remembered, but actively commemorated, teaching our children about courage, anti-racism, and civic responsibility.

Thomas S. Stone Elementary School is both a Community and Title one school with over 80% of our students walking to school every day. For the past two years, our school community has proudly celebrated Ruby Bridges Walk to School Day, and the impact has been meaningful and lasting for our students, staff, and families. Through these celebrations, we have seen firsthand how intentional recognition of Ruby Bridges' courage fosters important conversations around activism, anti-racism, inclusion, and anti-bullying, while also reinforcing the importance of safe travel to and from school.

Each year, our students and staff are welcomed by a joyful welcome team waving flags, cheering as students arrive, Ruby's song list in the background and handing out stickers along a chalk walk filled with inspiring words and messages of unity. Teachers are supported with a purple-themed snack station, and students spend the day engaged in age-appropriate activities including crafting keychains, love& hope garlands and bracelets, coloring, and reading together in the gym.

Our Digital Media Club further amplified the message by creating and sharing a video with our school community entitled "Be Like Ruby," highlighting the values of courage, kindness, and standing up for what is right. Students and staff arrived dressed in shades of purple, symbolizing unity and collective support for these shared values.

Most importantly, our students were deeply inspired by Ruby Bridges' bravery. The day created space for reflection, dialogue, and learning that extends far beyond a single event. Because of its success and impact, Ruby Bridges Walk to School Day will continue as an annual tradition at Thomas S. Stone Elementary.

HB 486 supports exactly this type of meaningful, community-centered engagement—one that honors history, promotes equity, encourages student voice, and emphasizes student safety. Codifying recognition of this day helps ensure that more schools across Maryland can benefit from the same powerful lessons and sense of unity we have experienced. Furthermore, combining this day with the promotion of safe pedestrian routes connects

the historic act of walking to school with modern, safe, and healthy practices for our students.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge a favorable report on HB 486. Thank you for your time, consideration, and continued commitment to Maryland's students and school communities.

Respectfully submitted,
Kameka Harris
President, Thomas S. Stone Elementary School PTO
Mount Rainier, Maryland