

Support for HB1043 — Right to Play Act

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

My name is Lorie Brewer, and I am a Maryland resident and homeschooling parent of five children. I am writing in strong support of HB1043, the Right to Play Act, which would allow homeschooled students to participate in athletics at their local public schools.

My decision to homeschool was not made lightly. Three of my children are dyslexic and have significant learning differences. One of my sons was placed by our county into a nonpublic special education school; however, it quickly became clear that the placement was not an appropriate fit for his needs. Despite extensive advocacy, I was ultimately told that my only option was to return him to his home public school without his Individualized Education Program (IEP) supports in place — something I knew would be academically and emotionally harmful for him. Faced with no viable alternative, I made the difficult decision to withdraw him and begin homeschooling.

Following that experience, I chose to homeschool my other children as well to ensure they received individualized instruction tailored to their learning needs. I had already homeschooled my oldest child, who struggled in traditional schooling but is now thriving as a college student. Today, homeschooling has allowed my dyslexic children to succeed academically, rebuild confidence, and develop a love of learning that was not possible in their prior school settings.

However, the inability to participate in sports at our local public school has remained a significant loss for my children. In fact, my freshman daughter chose to return to public school in ninth grade for one primary reason: the opportunity to try out for a school sport. She successfully made the team and is doing well overall, but she continues to struggle with dyslexia and must invest substantially more time and effort into her academic work than her peers. My younger homeschooled children, who have deeper roots in our homeschool community, have chosen to remain homeschooled and will not return to public school — yet they also carry the same desire to participate in school athletics.

My two younger homeschooled children have always been active in community and youth sports and love athletics. However, as they approach high school age, those opportunities will narrow significantly, and they will lose the ability to play alongside their local school peers solely because they are homeschooled. Unlike their older sister's situation, returning to public school is not an option for them, as homeschooling is the educational environment that best supports their learning needs. Without legislation like HB1043, they will simply lose access to school athletics entirely.

Their situation highlights the inequity HB1043 seeks to address. Families like mine should not be forced to choose between an educational setting that supports a child's learning differences and access to community-based athletics. We pay the same local and state school taxes that support these athletic programs, yet our homeschooled children are excluded solely because of their educational placement.

HB1043 would not take opportunities away from public school students. It would simply allow homeschooled students to try out and participate if they meet the same eligibility standards and requirements as enrolled students. This bill promotes fairness, inclusion, and student well-being.

For many homeschool students, athletics are not merely extracurricular; they are vital for physical health, teamwork, social development, and connection to community. My children have accepted many trade-offs in order to receive an education that meets their learning needs. The ability to participate in local school athletics is the only aspect of homeschooling they consistently feel is unfairly out of reach.

I respectfully urge a favorable report on HB1043 so that homeschooled students like my children may have the same opportunity to participate in public school athletics as their peers — without sacrificing an educational environment that allows them to thrive.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Lorie Brewer
Howard County, Maryland
Homeschool Parent