

Good [morning/afternoon]. My name is Ben Chico. I'm a lifelong Maryland resident and a senior psychology student at Loyola University Maryland, and I'm here today to express my strong support for legislation that mandates later school start times for middle and high school students. I attended school in Maryland my whole life, and I felt the impact of early start times firsthand. I often struggled to stay awake in class, and that fatigue made it harder to concentrate and learn. This isn't simply a matter of students choosing to stay up too late—it's a biological reality. During adolescence, circadian rhythms shift, which makes it natural for teens to fall asleep later and wake up later. When schools start early, many students can't get the recommended amount of sleep—around nine hours a night—even when they're trying.

As a result, students build up sleep debt over the course of the week and try to “catch up” on weekends. But sleep doesn't work like that. Just like you can't undo days of skipped meals with one big dinner, you can't fully reverse a week of sleep deprivation with a couple extra hours on Saturday and Sunday. And the consequences go well beyond feeling tired in class. Chronic sleep loss is associated with increased risks for health problems like obesity and cardiovascular issues, and it can undermine academic performance, mental health, and overall well-being.

I know one of the main concerns districts raise is transportation and scheduling. Those are real challenges—but they're solvable. Districts can optimize bus routes, adjust tiered schedules, and explore creative transportation approaches, and even save money doing so. Implementation takes planning, but logistics shouldn't outweigh what we know is best for students' health and learning.

At the end of the day, our priority should be investing in Maryland's students and their future. Giving adolescents a schedule that supports healthy sleep is a practical, evidence-based step toward better academic outcomes and healthier communities. I respectfully urge a favorable report on this legislation.

Thank you for your time and consideration.