

HB 1043 – Right to Play Favorable Testimony - Jennifer Lambert

As you know, HB1043 would allow homeschooled high school students to play sports in their public school. There are many opportunities for homeschooled students to play sports during K-8, however, many of those opportunities cease at the high school level.

I'd like to offer you a few points to consider:

- Although there are many club and recreational level opportunities for high schoolers, not every one of them offers certain sports. Football is one of them.
- Not every geographical area in Maryland has club and recreational level opportunities.
- We have some very talented athletes in our homeschool community who would like the same scouting and scholarship opportunities as public school athletes.
- Military families often come here from a right to play state, and suddenly, their children are no longer able to play their sports if they continue to homeschool.
- Sports are important to children's overall well-being no matter how or where they are educated.
- There has been an increase in growth in the homeschool community for a myriad of reasons. Why should children have to quit homeschooling to play sports or give up sports to homeschool? Either of these are unreasonable concessions to make.
- As tax paying citizens contributing financially to the public school system, our children should have the chance to participate in sports especially when there is no other opportunity outside of the public school.
- Children form friendships and relationships with coaches during youth programs. It would be beneficial to continue through the high school years rather than segregating them.
- Consider the children who will not thrive academically or emotionally in a public school setting or those who have special needs better suited at home, but who are still gifted athletes.
- We have the right to homeschool in Maryland, and the reasons for doing so are different for every family. There are as many reasons to homeschool as there are homeschooling families.

I think many people believe there will be a flood of homeschooled students invading their public school sports, and I just don't believe that will happen. By high school, serious athletes are willing to put in the work both on and off the field, meaning their studies are equally important. Grades and accountability are understandably a contentious argument, but again, I stress that at this point for an athlete, he or she is more than likely looking to play in college, making academics a priority. Something to note – when high school homeschoolers plan to attend college and pursue sports, the NCAA has academic requirements. I believe this to be a reassurance to anyone questioning the validity of the homeschoolers' academic work.

My oldest daughter was a competitive baton twirler. She won many national and world titles, traveled the world, and was a feature twirler at UMD. She was able to homeschool and twirl. My 16 year old son is a gifted athlete who has also won many titles as a youth athlete. He plans to take his sports as far as he can. He is now a high school sophomore, and we were forced to make the very difficult decision to send him to school since football is not an option outside of school. It is unfortunate that we had to make one of those concessions that I noted earlier. I have three other homeschooled children who are serious athletes and are hoping this bill passes.

Talent exists in the homeschool community. Our children are hoping for the opportunity and resources to develop, utilize, and contribute their skills.

I would also like to add that last year when a similar bill was presented, we had a petition that garnered over 1000 signatures. I invite you to look at it and read the comments from homeschool moms.

<https://www.change.org/p/hb1185-homeschool-students-in-maryland-right-to-play>

I have been very involved with potential legislation over the past several years and can speak to all the arguments from both sides. I believe this bill to be satisfactory to both the homeschool community and the opposition. There is nothing in it that would take away anything from homeschoolers or public school students. Counter points raised in the past have been addressed, so I ask that you find HB1043 favorable and be willing to negotiate.

Currently, over thirty-five states have Right to Play laws or policies in some capacity. There must be some sort of compromise for Maryland. It does not have to be complicated, and we are willing to make amendments and have a serious discussion as to how to make this work. Governor Moore is pro-athlete, and I would appreciate an opportunity to speak to you and him personally to discuss this very important issue. I implore you to reach out to me to discuss this further. I am available to help make this a reality that will satisfy everyone involved.

Thank you for your time and consideration to this important piece of legislation.

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