

HB 1545: Frederick County – Special Education Video and Audio Recording Program – Established

Position: FAVORABLE

House Ways and Means Committee

Hearing Date: March 12, 2026

Chair Wilkins, Vice Chair Feldmark, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of *House Bill 1545 – Frederick County – Special Education Video and Audio Recording Program – Established*, which would continue the existing Special Education Video pilot program in self-contained classrooms in Frederick County Public Schools (FCPS).

The safety of our most vulnerable students, those who depend on adults for nearly every part of their school day, is a responsibility that transcends party lines. Families of students in self-contained special education classrooms place immense trust in public schools. Many of these students are nonverbal, cognitively impaired, or medically fragile, and often cannot reliably communicate.

This vulnerability was tragically illustrated in October 2025, when a special education instructional assistant at an FCPS middle school was criminally charged with multiple counts of child sexual abuse. The Frederick County Sheriff's Office received the initial report on September 19, 2025, and the aide was taken into custody in early October after law enforcement executed a search warrant and discovered additional evidence. Documented charges filed are as follows:

Case Number: [C-10-CR-25-00091](#)

- Charge No. 1 – SEX ABUSE MINOR
- Charge No. 2 – Sex Off 3rd – Helpless/Impair Ind
- Charge No. 3 – Sex Off 3rd – Child <14
- Charge No. 4 – SEX ABUSE MINOR
- Charge No. 5 – Sex Off 3rd – Child <14

HB 1545 is structured to prioritize student protection while safeguarding privacy and reasonable use, including:

- Application limited to self-contained special education classrooms.
- Prohibition on video recording in bathrooms or changing areas, with audio permitted in those spaces for safety.
- Six-month video retention limit, unless footage is specifically requested.
- Language that prohibits use of recordings for employee performance evaluations.

These guardrails matter, especially when children with disabilities are at significantly higher risk of abuse than their nondisabled peers. Preventative safeguards are critical when a student cannot voice what has happened to them.

FCPS has been under federal scrutiny. In October 2020, the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) opened an investigation into FCPS' restraint and seclusion practices, finding discriminatory use of seclusion and restraint against students with disabilities in violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act. The resulting [settlement agreement](#), reached on December 1, 2021, required FCPS to end seclusion, overhaul restraint practices, implement reporting procedures, and provide training and oversight.

Even after these reforms, in March 2025, a student at an FCPS Elementary School was [inappropriately secluded in a stairwell](#), contrary to district policy and state law prohibiting seclusion. The incident was recorded on video by existing cameras and confirmed by an FCPS investigation in June 2025. This incident shows just how video can reveal policy violations that might otherwise go unnoticed.

These incidents demonstrate that, despite reform efforts, gaps in oversight persist, especially in classrooms where students cannot self-report or advocate for themselves.

Concerns about cost and unfunded mandates are valid; however, FCPS already launched a pilot program in select specialized classrooms in recent months, demonstrating that basic infrastructure and planning exist. Classroom recording installation costs are modest compared to the human and financial costs associated with abuse investigations, litigation, or systemic failure.

FCPS capital funding supports long-term investments such as buildings, renovations, and infrastructure. Within the Capital Improvement Program is a line item: Technology Equalization, which ensures schools have equitable, modern, and functional technology that supports learning and safety.

Permanent camera and audio systems in spaces where students with disabilities receive specialized instruction and care clearly fit this purpose. While surveillance upgrades are often grant-funded initially, they are typically sustained through state and local capital or operating budgets supported by Frederick County taxpayers.

The Maryland Center for School Safety provides many of these grants, is an independent unit of state government, reinforcing that school safety infrastructure is a shared responsibility.

On January 8, 2026, Governor Wes Moore stood on the stage of an FCPS High School and [announced a record \\$10.2 billion investment in Maryland public education](#), specifically \$480 million for public school capital projects, [highlighting that \\$28 million is for FCPS](#). That announcement made clear that the State recognizes the importance of investing in long-term school infrastructure.

As it is known, Maryland does not currently have a state law requiring cameras in special education classrooms; however, according to the Maryland State Education Association, local education agencies have the discretion to implement these programs.

Legislation provides consistency and permanence. While LEAs can adopt policies, they can also change with leadership or budget shifts. A statute creates uniform standards, transparency, and accountability. Clear statutory language prohibiting use of recordings for employee evaluation reinforces that the purpose is student safety. Not surveillance. Properly structured recording systems protect both students and staff from false allegations.

Cameras and audio are not substitutes for strong hiring practices, rigorous staff training, or sufficient staffing; rather, they are an additional layer of accountability in environments where students cannot self-report.

With the expressed understanding that student safety is nonpartisan, every child in Maryland deserves equal protection under the law, especially those who cannot speak for themselves. When our policies rely solely on self-reporting or traditional oversight in situations where a child cannot communicate harm, we leave the most vulnerable among us unprotected. HB 1545 is not about surveillance. HB 1545 is about dignity, safety, and accountability. Let us act with courage and compassion and give every child the protection they deserve.

For these reasons, I strongly urge the Committee to issue a Favorable Report on HB 1545.

Respectfully submitted,

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