

HB 0117 – Public Schools – Airway Clearing Device Availability and Use Policy

Position: SUPPORT

Committee: House Ways and Means Committee

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

My name is Miranda Hart, and I am a 17-year-old high school student and Maryland resident living in Carroll County. I am writing in strong support of House Bill 117, the Bowen Levy Airway Clearing Device Act.

As a student who has been trained in CPR and basic first aid, I understand both the importance of the Heimlich maneuver and its real-world limitations. The Heimlich maneuver is often the fastest response to a choking emergency and remains a critical first-line intervention. However, it is not effective in every situation and cannot always be performed safely or successfully.

According to the Cleveland Clinic, the Heimlich maneuver—also known as abdominal thrusts—is intended for use only on conscious individuals who are choking and unable to breathe. Once a person becomes unconscious, abdominal thrusts are no longer recommended (Cleveland Clinic, “Heimlich Maneuver,” last updated February 13, 2024). Medical guidance published by the National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI) further explains that unconscious individuals require a different emergency response, such as chest compressions, rather than abdominal thrusts (NCBI, StatPearls: Abdominal Thrust Maneuver). When abdominal thrusts do not work or a victim loses consciousness, options for immediately clearing the airway become extremely limited.

House Bill 117 does not seek to replace or eliminate the Heimlich maneuver. Instead, it acknowledges its limitations and provides an additional life-saving option when traditional methods are unsuccessful or no longer appropriate. Airway clearing devices can be used on both conscious and unconscious individuals, giving school staff another chance to restore airflow when time is critical.

This bill is needed because choking emergencies can happen to anyone in a school setting, and current response options do not adequately cover all situations or all students. House Bill 117 directly affects public school students across Maryland, including those with physical disabilities,

medical conditions, or swallowing difficulties that place them at higher risk of choking. It also impacts the educators, aides, and school staff responsible for student safety by expanding the tools available to them during emergencies.

Importantly, airway clearing devices are simpler to use and do not require the same level of physical strength, body positioning, or force needed to perform abdominal thrusts correctly. This allows a wider range of faculty and staff—regardless of size or physical ability—to respond effectively. In a real emergency, this increased accessibility can mean faster intervention and better outcomes for students in distress.

House Bill 117 responsibly includes training requirements, appropriate storage in eating areas, incident reporting, and good-faith liability protections. Together, these provisions ensure that airway clearing devices are used safely, appropriately, and only as a supplement to existing emergency protocols.

This legislation gives Maryland schools one more way to protect students and one more chance to save a life when current methods fall short. For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 117.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and commitment to student safety.

Respectfully submitted,

Miranda Hart