

Testimony for HB 189

House Ways & Means Committee

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

My name is Maribel Ibrahim and I am the Operations Director and Co-Founder of Start School Later. I'm also the Facilities Director of the Anne Arundel County Public Library and a parent of two Severna Park High school graduates and a high school junior.

As a Facilities Director, I understand that while libraries have the ability to run their operations as they see fit, we have requirements for potable water, heating and air conditioning, and life safety that supersede local operations. These are guardrails that ensure safety and they allow libraries to run their operations locally within these health and safety guidelines.

Similarly, schools have similar state level requirements for successful education, such as state mandated number of education days in a calendar year, fire safety, water quality, sprinklers and HVAC controls. In the same way, SB 103/HB 189 seeks to provide guardrails to ensure that students are going to school at a time that is healthy and safe for them to attend.

Lower traffic crashes, reduced afternoon crime, reductions in risky behavior and improved behavior, mood and performance in all aspects of life are the hallmarks of safe and healthy school start times. The science tells us that to continue with unsafe and unhealthy school start times is to do harm. Students across the county continue to suffer and our country is experiencing a sleep deprivation and mental health epidemic that is masked by high performance, an overload of activities and mounting pressure that worsens and perpetuates this cycle.

My younger two children benefitted from more rest, less stress, and the ability to make better decisions without suffering from sleep deprivation. My oldest suffered through going to school in the dark and he benefitted tremendously physically and emotionally during the virtual learning days of COVID and Anne Arundel's subsequent successful change to healthy and safe school start times for all students.

However, this change took over two decades to become a reality. The confluence of COVID and remote learning, our proven ability to pivot, and seeking nontraditional solutions led to this change. In addition, Anne Arundel enjoyed a cost SAVINGS in their transportation department as the new schedules reduced inefficiencies with zero added cost.

Previous legislation has stalled because school start times are perceived as a local issue. However, SB 103 is only a guardrail. Local schools still have discretion as to when to start schools within healthy boundaries. Many school districts find the change too daunting without legislation. SB 103/HB 189 will support schools by making student health a non-

negotiable priority. These guardrails will assist schools and allow them to locally manage their schedules within healthy guidelines.

We cannot afford to let more decades of children suffer with unhealthy and unsafe school start times. There are also advances in route planning software that enable schools to find low cost or no cost solutions. Regarding statewide legislation, California has done it. Florida has done it and there are other states that are seriously looking at this legislation. It's time for Maryland to ensure schools can operate at safe and healthy times. Maryland took the lead with the first successful legislation to study school start times. Let's lead again and help our schools make the changes that need to happen.

Please vote favorably for SB 103/HB 189 to protect student health and to make our communities safe.

Sincerely,

Maribel Ibrahim

Severna Park, MD