

**HOUSE BILL 1022: EDUCATION – ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS – REPORTING
REQUIREMENTS
HEARING BEFORE THE HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE
FEBRUARY 26, 2020**

POSITION: FAVORABLE

Testimony of Sarah Jones

My name is Sarah Jones and I am a parent of an 11th grade student in Baltimore County Public Schools. I am before you today to testify in support of House Bill 1022 Education – Alternative Schools – Reporting Requirements. Due to the current failed system, my son was transferred to an alternative school in Baltimore County for over 200 days. As a result, his academic career, mental health and future goals have been decimated.

Joe was a student in the Academy of Health Program at Eastern Technical High School in Baltimore County. He is a show horse rider, decorated junior Freemason, and a few weeks away from becoming an Eagle Scout. He was referred to the Superintendent's Office for a first-time non-violent offense which resulted in Joe being transferred indefinitely to an alternative school in Baltimore County called E-Learning as a form of discipline. Once Joe was transferred there was no more oversight by the Superintendent's Office, Eastern Tech, or the pupil personnel worker assigned to Joe's case. All three parties verbally admitted to having no knowledge of Joe's enrollment in E-Learning months after he was enrolled. **THIS IS AN EXPLICIT EXAMPLE WHY THIS COMMITTEE AND THE MARYLAND GENERAL ASSEMBLY MUST PASS HB 1022!**

Joe was transferred to E-Learning at the beginning of the 4th quarter of his 10th grade year at Eastern Tech. Unfortunately, the Superintendent's Office provided ZERO information on the program, how to enroll and refused to indicate how Joe's enrollment in E-Learning would impact his progress in the Academy of Health Program.

After seven months the Superintendent's Office released Joe from the E-Learning Program upon which I IMMEDIATELY enrolled Joe in Perry Hall High School. Of the six classes Joe was taking through E-Learning, five were offered at Perry Hall. Joe started three new classes at a new school almost halfway through his junior year. **THIS WAS TOUGH!**

None of the classes offered through E-Learning supported Joe's advancement in the Academy of Health curriculum. Every day Joe was assigned to E-Learning was a day he fell behind in his regular academic programming. When Joe was finally permitted to return to school, he had fallen so far behind, it was unreasonable for him to catch up. While enrolled in E-Learning, Joe was eventually removed from the Academy of Health Program and expelled from Eastern Tech.

There was no support offered to us by Eastern Tech, the Superintendent's Office, the pupil personnel worker, or Baltimore County Public Schools during Joe's enrollment, attendance, or his transition out of E-Learning and into a new school. I was solely responsible for enrolling Joe and making sure he attended his classes every day from a laptop at our kitchen table. I am a single mom and I work full time. The lack of support, information, and oversight made this experience almost impossible and resulted in me missing over 50 hours of work. No one reached out to me or Joe at any time during his enrollment to ensure he was enrolled, check on his progress, or if he was even attending classes.

While enrolled in E-Learning Joe was not permitted to attend school functions or set foot on Baltimore County School Property isolating him from his friends and many social activities, including Homecoming and his Junior Ring Ceremony. The length of time Joe was isolated from his peers not only stigmatized him but lead to him falling into a severe depression.

The Superintendents' Office categorized Joe's expulsion as an "administrative transfer to alternative learning," wrongfully allowing the Superintendent's Office to ignore the laws governing the administration of an expulsion entirely. I was refused meetings when Joe was expelled first from Eastern Tech, then again when his transfer exceeded the 45-day threshold to qualify as an expulsion. The Superintendent's Office threatened to keep Joe from going back to school longer if I tried to file an appeal, and the pupil personnel worker told me to consult an attorney if I wanted information regarding my son's case. Without any regulation surrounding the administration of transferring a student to an alternative school, I was afforded no recourse regarding the legality of what was happening to Joe.

Being transferred to an alternative school for over 200 days permanently changed Joe's life.

In Summation

- He cannot graduate with the Certified Nursing Certificate now,
- his academic path is so far off course it is unrecoverable,
- he is permanently stigmatized socially, and his high school athletic career has been ruined,
- and he is psychologically damaged from the amount of time spent in isolation.

As a PARENT, I am dedicated and committed to doing what is FAIR and JUST for my son and preventing further students' lives from being destroyed by local school boards and superintendents who operate behind the scenes without regulation, and oversight. If Joe MUST be accountable for his actions they MUST too! House Bill 1022 will make this happen.

I thank you for giving me the opportunity to share Joe's story with you today and why I support this bill.

I strongly urge The Committee to vote in favor for House Bill 1022. I am happy to answer any questions.

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