



February 3, 2021

Testimony of Laura Hale

American Heart Association

Support with Amendments of HB 621- Prince George's County – Elementary School Students – Daily Physical Activity (Student Health and Fitness Act) PG 504–21

Dear Members of the Committee of Ways and Means,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before you today. My name is Laura Hale and I am the Director of Government Relations for the American Heart Association. The American Heart Association offers our support of HB 621 with an amendment to extend the number minutes of physical education to 150 per week.

HB 621 takes an important first step in prioritizing the health of Maryland's elementary schoolers. It is essential for students to learn early in life on how to exercise and keep active for long term heart health. Unfortunately, many students in Maryland are not active enough every day. This leads to higher rates of obesity and ultimately higher rates of heart disease later in life. Creating time in student's day to learn physical education is essential for their long-term health and wellbeing.

General physical activity is important; however, it is key that students learn how to exercise and establish healthy habits. This is done through Physical Education classes. 'Physical education' is an academic subject and serves as the foundation of a Comprehensive School Physical Activity Program (CSPAP) and, as such, demands the same educational rigor as other core subjects. Physical education provides students with a planned, sequential, K-12 standards-based program of curricula and instruction designed to develop motor skills, knowledge and behaviors for active living, physical fitness, sportsmanship, self-efficacy and emotional intelligence. Being active on a regular basis can reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression and is related to improved self-esteem and greater development in social settings. Physical education builds physical literacy which is defined as "the ability, confidence, and desire to be physically active for life." Requiring a minimum of 150 minutes of physical education per week is key to help students learn how to lead active lives.

This legislation begins an important journey to improve heart health in Maryland. Establishing time in the day for students to learn how to live healthy, more active lives will create a generation of healthier Marylanders.

The American Heart Association urges a favorable report with amendment of 150 minutes of physical education per week for HB 621.