

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT

with Amendments

Testimony to the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

In support of

Senate Bill 519: Education - Student-Organized Peaceful Demonstrations - Student Discipline and Policy

February 16, 2022

Strong Schools Maryland urges an amended favorable vote on Senate Bill 519: Education - Student-Organized Peaceful Demonstrations - Student Discipline and Policy.

The Blueprint for Maryland's Future envisions a world-class system of public schools for our state's students. In this system, the voices of students must be especially valued. The Blueprint cannot possibly address all the issues that will ever exist in the realm of public education, but its vision of world-class schools can be achieved with the support of other accompanying policies that rise to meet the moment.

Senate Bill 519 is a good example of accompanying policy and would:

- Protect the free speech and peaceful assembly rights of students specifically to participate in and create their own peaceful demonstrations on school grounds;
- Prohibits public schools from imposing limits that inhibit students' right to free speech during such demonstrations; and
- Prohibit public schools from disciplining students who participate in and/or organize such peaceful demonstrations

We recommend the following amendment to further the intent of the bill:

- [page 2, beginning on line 25] Rather than requiring individual students to notify administration of their intent to engage in a protest, which may pose issues for students who do not have strong relationships with their administration, require that administration be notified of the demonstrations event, period; and
- In addition to prohibiting schools from disciplining students who participate in/organizing peaceful demonstrations, an amendment to prohibit any staff member from retaliating against students for their participation/organizing of such events would serve as a protective factor for students who experience resulting discrimination that is not "discipline".

In Maryland and around the country, adults have taken full advantage of their first amendment right to free speech, even if it has meant turning school buildings and government buildings into battlegrounds. To deny Maryland's students their right to peacefully assert their own rights, we are disenfranchising a generation at a pivotal moment in history and operating in conflict with the intent of the Blueprint—to create a generation of Marylanders who can contend with the world. We urge an amended favorable report on Senate Bill 519.

If you have questions or requests for additional information, you can email:

Shamoyia Gardiner

Executive Director

shamoyia@strongschoolsmaryland.org