

KATIE FRY HESTER
Legislative District 9
Carroll and Howard Counties

Education, Health, and
Environmental Affairs Committee

Chair, Joint Committee on
Cybersecurity, Information Technology
and Biotechnology



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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony in Support of SB756 - University System of Maryland - County School Technology Program - Established

March 8, 2022

Chairman Pinsky, Vice-Chair Kagan, and members of the Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee, thank you for your consideration of Senate Bill 756, which I have sponsored on behalf of the Parent Teacher Association of Howard County, and which will establish a pilot program within the University System of Maryland to study school redistricting using advanced data analytics tools and GIS.

Across the nation, school redistricting is often a controversial topic. Where our children learn is important to both the children and the parents themselves, and it's difficult to make everyone entirely happy. School boards face extremely difficult decisions to balance countervailing priorities, while trying to keep as many families satisfied as possible. This bill aims to assist school boards in making these decisions by studying how advanced statistical tools could reshape how redistricting is done. The pilot program established under this bill will begin by studying Howard County's redistricting process and identifying where applied data tools can be utilized to remove personal influence, predict the size of future pre-kindergarten classes, and report findings to the General Assembly. Furthermore, if Howard County were to redistrict their schools, this pilot would conduct a parallel process to demonstrate the validity of its recommendations in real time.

If SB756 passes, this program could provide a clear and translatable blueprint for school redistricting in other jurisdictions across the state. It would also demonstrate the utility of leveraging advanced tools to redistricting and make the process smoother for all parties. The Howard County School System has voted to support this legislation with some clarifying amendments, and Towson University's Division of Strategic Partnerships and Applied Research has indicated their interest in taking on the pilot program.

For these reasons, I respectfully request a favorable report on Senate Bill 756.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Katie Fry Hester".

Senator Katie Fry Hester
Carroll and Howard Counties