

My name is Amy Dykes and I am here to speak in favor of SB 311 – the Teacher Pay Parity Act.

I am a teacher at Kennedy Krieger High School in Baltimore. My career in the field of special education began in 2012. After graduating from Towson University with a dual degree in elementary and special education, I became a special educator with Harford County Public Schools.

However, I was not satisfied in the public setting. I believed that I could offer so much more to students with disabilities, if only I worked in an environment with better, more practical resources. I decided to submit my resignation and pursue a teaching position at a nonpublic special education school. The 2022-23 school year now marks my 7th year at Kennedy Krieger.

All of our students are publicly funded and placed by their Local School System (LSS) when local IEP teams agree that the public setting cannot appropriately program for the student's level of need. Our students not only have learning difficulties, but they have social and emotional needs and some have intense behavioral challenges. Each student, however, is so unique and wonderful, and we celebrate their progress, no matter how seemingly small, every darn day. I cannot begin to describe the joy I feel when I hear parents tell me how grateful they are to see their years of endless advocacy rewarded with a placement in a nonpublic program. It is frustrating to know that while I'm working with very complex students, I am being paid less than my public school peers. It has been well established that there is a significant salary disparity between nonpublic teachers and public school teachers.

I want to thank the legislature for recognizing this unfair disparity and providing funding in FY 22 and in FY 23 to supplement our salaries. I urge you to continue your support by voting in favor of this year's bill, SB 311.

This bill and proposed funding will serve to make a direct impact in the lives of students with disabilities across the state of Maryland. This bill will ensure that highly qualified special educators continue their positions at non-public placements in the state of Maryland and do not leave their students because of the very real issues we face in pay parity.

Thank you for your consideration and commitment to support the teachers who are serving Maryland's most complex students by casting a vote in favor of SB311.