

From the desk of
JONATHON T. DIPIETRO
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TO: Maryland General Assembly, House Committee on Ways and Means
FROM: Jonathon DiPietro, *Director Emeritus, Maryland Student Coalition*
(Bachelor's/Master's of Legal Studies Student at American University)
RE: House Bill 568 – FAVORABLE

I am writing to express my strong **support** for **House Bill 568**, which seeks to protect the First Amendment rights of Maryland's students by allowing them to organize and participate in peaceful demonstrations. I am a Maryland resident and proud graduate of the Maryland public school system.

The story of education in the United States is steeped in a rich history of student activism, where young people have long invoked their rights to free expression, speech, and assembly to create lasting change in their communities. In recent years, we have witnessed an explosive surge of youth-led protests and walkouts, as a new generation of passionate and engaged students has risen up to confront social issues that have long plagued our society. These young activists have recognized that immediate action is needed to address these challenges, and that the future they will inherit is contingent upon their actions in the present. Through the power of their advocacy, these students have learned how to keep their government accountable, and create real, meaningful change. And they've done it all on the very ground where they learn and grow: their schools. But as the frequency of student demonstrations grows, so too does the opposition to their voices, with school administrators using tired arguments of disruption and truancy to silence these passionate young voices. That's why student leaders are calling on you to establish concrete protections for students' right to protest on school grounds, so that the next generation of changemakers can continue to make their voices heard.

This legislation protects all public secondary school students' rights to engage in a "student-organized peaceful demonstration" and restricts demonstrations that incite a clear and present danger to the school community or unlawful or dangerous acts. The bill requires that students notify the school administration of their intent to organize such a demonstration at least 48 hours in advance and comply with their school board's written policy. This creates a two-way communication channel to both foster a productive learning environment and protect the rights of students.


HB 568 is of particular importance because it ensures that students cannot be punished for peacefully exercising their First Amendment rights. This bill recognizes the importance of student voice and input in our schools. By creating a collaborative process for organizing demonstrations that includes both school and student perspectives, we are fostering a culture of democracy and active citizenship. This is essential for preparing our young people to be engaged and informed members of our society.

Finally, by requiring each county board of education to develop a written policy regarding student-organized peaceful demonstrations, HB568 ensures that schools are consistent in their approach to these activities and provides a clear framework for students to exercise their rights.

As a proud product of K12 Maryland public schools, I strongly urge the committee to issue a **favorable** report on House Bill 568, and uphold the First Amendment rights of Maryland's students.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Jonathon DiPietro
Legislative District 9B