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## **Testimony in opposition to House Bill 985**

### **Virtual Schools - Alterations**

#### **House Ways and Means**

**March 1, 2023**

**1:00pm**

#### **The Baltimore Teachers Union opposes House Bill 985.**

The Baltimore Teachers Union represents 8,280 teachers, paraprofessionals, counselors, clinicians, librarians, secretaries, community school site specialists, bus transportation aides, and many more school-based and central office support staff. We are 4 out of 5 workers in Baltimore City Public Schools, serving 75,595 students and their families. Our national union, the American Federation of Teachers, has over 1.7 million members in the United States and its territories.

Exempting virtual schools from any obligation to comply with state requirements for the basic components of education such as instruction, staffing, professional development, textbooks and curriculum is a bad idea. HB 985 will deny the students most in need, including those with disabilities, who may want or need virtual education the possibility of obtaining the free appropriate public education guaranteed to them by federal and state laws.

During the pandemic-related school building closures we learned first hand of the challenges of virtual education. Many of our students could not log in or participate with regularity and consistency. In many communities parents/guardians were unable to support and monitor virtual instruction because of their employment and other caregiver responsibilities. Many students struggled greatly with virtual learning because they did not have quiet spaces to work from in their homes, or reliable and consistent technology and WI-FI. In addition to removing itself from most legal obligations of providing a free and appropriate education, House Bill 985 does not offer an alternative that would allow children who need in-person services or in-person support to access virtual education to receive those services or support.

**For these reasons, the Baltimore Teachers Union opposes House Bill 985.**