Written Testimony Submitted for the Record to the
Maryland House of Delegates
Ways and Means Committee
For the Hearing on
County Boards of Education – Equal Access to Public Services for
Individuals with Limited English Proficiency (HB 1144)
March 1, 2019

SUPPORT

Maryland PTA is the state’s oldest and largest child advocacy organization that serves as a powerful voice for all children, a relevant resource for families, schools and communities and a strong advocate for public education. We represent thousands of volunteer members in 900 public schools and we are comprised of families, students, teachers, administrators, and business as well as community leaders devoted to the educational success of children and family engagement in Maryland. For nearly 104 years, our mission has been to make every child’s potential a reality by engaging and empowering families and communities to advocate for all children.

Maryland PTA submits this testimony in support of HB 1144, County Boards of Education – Equal Access to Public Services for Individuals with Limited English Proficiency, which establishes a requirement that each county board of education provides equal access to public services for individuals with limited English proficiency.

The need for this legislation is made evident by a March 2017 report by the Maryland Equity Project on the enrollment of English Language Learners (ELLs) in Maryland schools, which is one of the fastest growing segments of public-school enrollment. The report concluded that:

“ELL student enrollment in Maryland public schools more than doubled between 2000 and 2013, growing from 2.8% of total enrollment in 2000 to 6.5% in 2014. Given these recent demographic trends, it is very likely that the ELL student population in Maryland will continue increasing. For that reason, Maryland and school districts need to determine how to best serve this rapidly growing population. It is also crucial to analyze how ELLs are distributed across schools in order to allocate the kinds of resources they need and avoid racial or ethnic segregation. Understanding these demographic trends and meeting the needs of these culturally and linguistically diverse student populations must be a priority for both educators and policymakers.” Source: Montoya Ávila, A. (2017). Trends in Maryland Public Schools: English Language Learner Enrollment. College Park, MD: Maryland Equity Project, The University of Maryland.
This bill will also have a positive impact on efforts to improve family engagement through the requirement to provide translation of vital documents ordinarily provided to the public. All parents can and should participate meaningfully in their children’s education, including those with limited English proficiency. In light of research showing a strong correlation between academic achievement of students and local school district policies which promote family engagement in their children’s education, the National PTA adopted its six National Standards for Family School Partnerships. Many of these standards have been adopted by many school districts nationwide as a model for collaboration between parents, schools, and communities to support student success. Standard 2 calls on school districts to “Communicate Effectively”, so that “Families and school staff may engage in regular, two-way, meaningful communication about student learning.” This legislation aligns with Standard 2 by increasing access to important information for family members with limited English proficiency.

For the reasons stated above, Maryland PTA asks that you return a favorable report for HB 1144.

Testimony is presented on the behalf of

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